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THE DEAN AND HIS DAUGHTER.

BY

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"JACK AND THREE JILLS," "SOCIAL VICINSTITUTES."

4 In Three Volumes.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

WARD AND DOWNEY,

12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

1887.

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Badham Pile & Co., Ltd.

**CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.**

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CHAPTER I.

WE found Torquay, a place perfectly intolerable, filled with rich parvenus, and oppressive with its glare of stucco. We were told of pleasant places inland: Totnes among others, and Paignton, now a mere suburb of Torquay, were both mentioned. Then glowing descriptions were given us of the magnificent scenery of the Dart and of Dartmouth Harbour. Ultimately we decided upon giving a trial to a place very little known, but certainly none the less desirable on that account.

We pitched on Lydall, an extraordinary little village on the Cornwall coast, somewhere about ten miles distant from the nearest railway station.

The houses in Lydall are built of stone, and roofed with slate, both Cornwall products. The walls are of stone, for there are no hedges to divide the fields. The Vicar, who is rich on sixty pounds a year, a stone house, and an acre of salt marsh known as the glebe, is the only man of importance, with the exception of the landlord of the small inn, who is also proprietor of one or two shabby stone villas, which he lets furnished for the season at a very fair price.

To Lydall accordingly we went, and there I once again began to feel myself. A pony carriage, much as I should have

enjoyed it, was out of the question. The Cornish roads would kill any decent pony in a week; but there was the Cove, always pleasant and beautiful, and as entirely land-locked as the Bay of San Francisco.

We used to saunter about the lanes, and sit on the beach and distribute figs and sweetmeats among the children, who were grossly ignorant and poverty-stricken, but in vigorous health.

Only fancy village children, who have heard the cuckoo all their lives and do not even know its name.

"I have found, my dear," said Mrs. Fortescue one evening, "two exceptions to the uniform and monstrous stupidity of this place."

"Who or what are they?" I inquired.

"They are the ostler here at the inn, and an old vagabond who is strongly suspected of being a poacher, but who is one of the most amusing rascals with whom I have ever talked. The ostler is believed to know rather more about French brandy than he generally cares to own. It may be a scandal, for he is a very civil man indeed; but the fact is not a secret here. They say that he was once a gentleman, but he himself is very reticent with regard to his past career."

And so our days passed pleasantly enough. We lived, so Mrs. Fortescue declared, like duchesses, except in the one matter of *salon* accommodation, and we lived for next to nothing.

"We are not saving money, my dear, we are almost making it," Mrs. Fortescue

used to say. "It is a place of enchantment and of perfect solitude."

We were standing, as she repeated this, in the little garden outside our house, which was devoted according to the season to roses, hollyhocks, mignonette, sweet peas, and almost every variety of garden produce.

Suddenly we became aware that Lydall *en masse*—the men, women, and children—was making its way down to the Cove.

"It can't be the Plymouth boat, Miriam," said Mrs. Fortescue. "That doesn't come to-day. Come along, get your hat."

I did as I was told, and we hurried down to the Cove. A steamer was perceptible nearing straight for the narrow channel. As she grew nearer, we could see the white ensign.

The solitary Coastguardsman politely

offered us his glass, and lowered his shoulder to afford a convenient rest for that weather-beaten instrument, which, if village report were but half true, had more than once served him in good stead as a useful and handy substitute for a constable's truncheon.

Mrs. Fortescue took the first peep, and without comment handed the glass on to me. I looked through it, and saw standing erect in the very bows of the vessel, and scanning the shore through a field glass, no other person than George Sabine.

Mrs. Fortescue took my arm, and tried to hurry me towards our house.

"We shall have to meet, dear child," she whispered; "and the thing had better not be done quite in open vestry. Let us avoid the parson and the clerk, and the churchwarden, and all the other old women as long as we can possibly manage to do so."

But a strange fascination rooted me to the spot, and as the vessel steamed through the narrow little pass between the cliffs into the Cove, I heard the words "let go," called out in a voice that I knew only too well; and immediately afterwards the puff of the engines ceased, and the click and rattle of the cable struck my ear as distinctly as the tick of a large watch.

"We must go in," said Mrs. Fortescue, "and we must leave word, or send down word, which will look better, that you cannot possibly be seen until eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. Eleven o'clock is always an excellent time."

We went in and gave our instructions. It was exactly as Mrs. Fortescue had predicted. Before ten minutes had passed, Mr. Sabine had called at the house, had had his answer, had left his card with *Yacht*

Evangeline, R.Y.S. in the corner of it, and had made his way back to the Cove.

“The village will talk, my dear,” said Mrs. Fortescue; “but it will all be about the yacht, and everybody will be mad for permission to go on board her. They will be rowing round her till sunset, and with daybreak to-morrow morning, and they will be trying to sell him eggs and butter, and poultry and meat, and all that kind of thing—all of which he will probably have on board. I should not be surprised if the innkeeper did not go alongside with some bottles of British brandy, and his Gospel oath in his mouth that they had never paid duty, which would be strictly true, though not exactly in his own sense. And now you must go to bed at once, or the Cornish roses in your cheeks will

be fading to-morrow. Come along, I am lady's maid."

Next morning at eleven we were in our little parlour and seated at the window. Within a minute of the time, Mr. Sabine came swinging up the road with the same long, lithe, panther-like step.

His immense boarhound slouched along after him, and as the master passed through our garden gates, the hound in obedience to a gesture coiled himself up outside them, and lay down with such a dangerous look about him that the crowd of village children and gossips somehow melted away.

I rose to meet him as he entered the room and held out my hand. I was happy and glad to see him, and I know my face must have told him as much.

Then he greeted Mrs. Fortescue, and then he somehow settled himself in a wicker-work chair.

"The sea has thrown me up," he said, "high and dry in this curious little nook. I am told that there is no doctor within five miles, and no lawyer within eight or ten. Also there is no local reporter, and consequently no list of fashionable arrivals. We might almost be at St. Helena or Ascension. It is delightful to be for once in a way in a pretty place, and to have it all to yourself. Mrs. Fortescue, I am shocked to see you here. You ought by this time to have bound the Dean to your chariot wheels, and to be driving with him round the Cathedral Close."

And then we all laughed, a hearty, genuine laugh, that did all of us good.

Presently it was settled that we should

take a stroll, and as we passed out through the street, we found that public curiosity had subsided. Everybody had gone down to the Cove to stare at the yacht and her crew, and to drive little bargains with them, if possible. And so, as Mrs. Fortescue declared herself unequal to a tramp through the chalk, Mr. Sabine, and I, and Serge, sauntered up the hill together.

Presently we reached a large field of green wheat, just beginning to show streaks of gold on the light soil under the keen sun. "Waves of shadow" passed over it, and all Nature seemed alive as we crossed over the little stile.

A lark was singing gloriously, hovering over its nest. A blackbird darted out from the hedge with its noisy shriek close under our feet, and right across our path. Then a shy little field-mouse showed itself

scuttering about between the ears. And in a beech tree overhead, a bright-eyed squirrel sat up and looked saucily at us as he went on shelling his mast.

The twitter of the small birds would have seemed petulant but for the drowsy hum of the insects and the strange whirr of the corncrake, now near, now distant, and obviously trying to lure us from the vicinity of its nest.

We rested at last on another stile which led into a hayfield, that made the air heavy with its wealth of clover. I sat down almost out of breath on the step. Serge coiled himself up at my feet. Mr. Sabine leaned against the top rail, shook himself much after the manner of his own hound, and then lit a cigar.

"I am glad to see you," he broke silence; "looking better than I had hoped.

You must have had a terrible trial, and a wretchedly dull time of it. We have not, however, long to wait. My lawyers tell me that we can be married on this very day four months, which will be the day after what they call the decree is made absolute. Four months seems a long time when you are waiting, but it passes rapidly enough. I suppose it would have been more prudent not to have come near you. But in the first place I could not possibly keep away from you, and in the next place I wished you to know once again from my own lips, that I shall come to claim you. Meantime I would hurry you away with me from here to the South, but I am resolved that no one shall have the chance of speaking evil of your name with the shadow of truth behind it."

"You are very good," I answered chokingly, "far more good than I deserve." And then I burst out crying.

Well, he comforted me, of course, in his own way, as tenderly as if I was some little village maid who had fallen down on the flints, and torn her clothes, and cut her hands and knees. And when my tears were dried and I had stammered out something about being foolish, and not feeling very strong, and the heat, and so on, saying just whatever came first, he gave me his arm again, and we strolled down the hill back to the village.

A journey seems always short when it is downhill, and shorter still when it is happy.

Mrs. Fortescue had spied us, and was in waiting for us at the little cottages by the Vicarage corner. Then, of course, con-

versation began at once. It was commonplace, brisk, and cheerful, and principally sustained by Mrs. Fortescue herself.

No power on earth, she declared, would make her go on board the yacht, or allow me to go. It would be unlucky. The gig might come next morning and row us round to the little island, if Mr. Sabine liked, and we could picnic there splendidly. Meantime lunch was ready, and we must come in. It had been waiting some time; but, luckily, that didn't matter, as everything was cold, and the ice hadn't melted, for the very simple and sufficient reason that there wasn't a knob of ice as big as a walnut for all the Cornish sun to melt.

So we went in and lingered over lunch, and were really as happy, and I can honestly say as innocent, in all our happiness as children.

How the time passed I cannot tell ; but I know that the shadows were lengthening rapidly, and the swallows flying low as we sauntered down to the Cove.

We saw the boat pull off. We watched Mr. Sabine spring on to the deck, and we waved our farewell to him from the sands before we turned back.

“You ought to be a very happy woman, my dear,” said Mrs. Fortescue, as she sat in the twilight in her chair before the empty hearth, with her tumbler of brandy and soda-water. “I am tired of telling you that I wish I were half as happy as yourself. You are rid of that insufferable old prig, Sir Henry ; you are rid of that canting old humbug, your father ; and there is a man madly in love with you, of whom any woman might be proud, and for whom nine women out of every ten would give

their heads and ears. I shan't alter my opinion, and I can't add to it; and I've finished my brandy and soda, and it's high time for all good people to be in bed."

CHAPTER II.

SOME days passed, it may have been a couple of weeks, when the worst news came to me that I had ever yet received in my life.

It came in this fashion. We did not get our London papers until the following morning, so that their news was always a day old.

Knowing Mrs. Fortescue's love of news of any sort or kind, it was arranged between us, that she should have the paper first. If it contained anything likely to interest

me she would tell me so, and I hardly ever looked at it except by her suggestion.

When she and I had finished, we sent the paper on to an old dame in the village, from whom it passed through many hands. Lydall boasts no reading-room, and a newspaper there is a thing as precious as a home letter at the foot of the Himalayas.

One day I missed the paper, and complained that I had not seen it; but the complaint was a passing one, and only received a passing answer. Nor did I trouble myself about the matter.

And yet, strangely enough, I felt all that day a curious and almost oppressive presentiment of evil. I could not formulate this uneasiness in any way. I knew of nothing and expected nothing likely to give me sorrow or even trouble; and yet

the air seemed heavy as if with coming thunder.

It is the fashion to call this kind of weird emotion, nervousness, which is to adopt the latest device of modern quackery, and to imagine that you have explained a thing, because you have given it a new and somewhat barbarous name.

My nervousness, or whatever it might be, refused to be shaken off, and I resolved to try the effect of a stroll to the Cove. As I neared the beach I passed an old woman, an out-door pensioner of mine in a small way, and stopped to inquire about her rheumatism.

Oh, it was bad, it was dreadfully bad. Could I send her a little more flannel? She didn't want any more brandy; she had plenty left. But a little more flannel would be most grateful. If I had an old

blanket now. She did not want to have a blanket from me, but I could give her half of it, and she could make a belt for herself and a couple of pinovers for her chest.

I promised the blanket at once, and told her to call for it that evening; but the old dame broke out afresh.

“What a dreadful thing! Oh dear! oh dear! Such a fine gentleman, and such a fine vessel. There hadn’t been such a vessel in the Cove for years. No! not since the great lord come there.”

I started, and caught at my heart. Then I fancy my whole manner must have changed, for the ancient dame began to mumble out a long story in the manner of a child in disgrace, and afraid of a beating.

“It was the vessel that had come into the Cove,” she told me, “the beautiful steam-

ship, with the captain and all the crew, and the gentleman with the great big dog, as big as a calf. She'd been seen and signalled off the Lizard, but nothing had been heard of her since, and now everybody said she must have gone down. They said so at the Coastguard station. Her casks had been picked up, and her hen-coops; and, worst of all, her longboat had been found upside down.

“She must have been run into by some other vessel, or else she must have run into an old wreck drifting about keel up like old wrecks do. It was very sad; but we were all in the hands of the Lord.”

How I managed to shake off the old dame, and how I got home, I cannot recollect. When I first became conscious of what was about me, it seemed as if I were

in Sackville Street again, for I was lying in bed, and Ethel Fortescue was by me.

This time, however, her manner was changed. At Sackville Street she made light of everything. Now she was tender and affectionate, but evidently viewed matters gravely. What little comfort she could give me was not much; and yet I clutched at it.

“The man, darling Miriam, has a charmed life; and a charmed life is as certain a thing as the Evil Eye. Look at what he has done already. Look at what we know of him, not what he has told us—for he never talks about himself—but what we have heard. He has faced death over and over again, and has laughed at it. Mark my words, we shall see him yet.”

I tried to be comforted, but I am afraid

the effort was only too transparent. It most certainly was not successful.

“We will have down the *Shipping Gazette*. I will write to London for it at once. Lloyd’s agents telegraph every piece of intelligence from all over the world. Meantime, we must be brave. That is the first duty of a sailor’s wife. And we must look forward to the future, and not back to the past.”

Beyond this comfort, she had none to give me, and day after day went by. The *Shipping Gazette* came, but I could not understand it, nor do I believe that Ethel did. It simply bewildered us.

So we waited on, vainly endeavouring to hope against hope. August passed, and September and October, but all without news. Then we both of us said nothing, for we knew the worst. If the *Evangeline*

had not gone down, she must have reached some port from which I should at once have had a telegram. If she had gone down, and any of her crew or of those on board her had been rescued by a passing vessel, or had taken to the boats and had been picked up, the news would have been received at Lloyd's long before this.

Every ocean-going vessel, so I found out, signals every other as she passes. Sometimes, if not running against time they will even lie to for a quarter-of-an-hour and exchange letters and newspapers.

Vessels, so I began to learn, are liable to suddenly founder in mid-ocean without time for the crew even to clamber into the boats, and these chances are especially serious in the case of steam vessels. The boiler may burst and two minutes after-

wards not a ripple on the ocean will tell the story.

Or a floating derelict, keel uppermost, as the old dame had suggested, may be crushed into. And then the doomed ship will in a few seconds settle down head first, while the cause of her misfortune, far more dangerous than any iceberg, will float away, circling round about with the ocean currents on her journey of destruction.

At the end of September, we shut up our little house at Lydall and came up to London. We had ceased to talk any longer of George Sabine or of the yacht. All that I could now do was to treasure his memory as that of the best and the dearest friend I had ever had.

Writing now, when years have passed and the bitterness of the grief has died

away, I can say honestly that he was the noblest man I ever knew. Truthful, incapable of fear, gentle to tenderness, and entirely unselfish.

For such men these are not the times.

I cannot conclude the story of this portion of my life without some mention of a letter which I received from my father.

Commencing with the remark that it was for a Higher Power than that of man to search the human heart, and that nothing was more presumptuous in us than to pass judgment on our fellow sinners, seeing that we were all equal before the searching eye of Omnipotence, he went on to trace the finger of Providence, as he was pleased to call it, in the fact

that the "partner in my guilt" had passed before the last terrible Tribunal, still leaving me time to evince my repentance by appropriate contrition.

His own health, he went on to say, was rapidly failing, and his duties were onerous; but he trusted none the less that the Divine blessing had prospered his labours. If it would give me any comfort to see him he would hurry down at once; but he certainly, after what had passed at our last interview, would not do so uninvited.

It was sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child; but his own conscience was clear and void of offence, and he supposed that in that fact, and in that alone, he must seek for his consolation.

The epistle, *ad partes infidelium*, con-

cluded with some appropriate general reflections, not forgetting a complaint that the present were revolutionary times in which Church and State alike were threatened, and that the Clerk to the Chapter found it impossible to collect the Cathedral rents or to pay the small stipends with anything like the punctuality that could be desired.

My first impulse was to tear this precious document up. My second was to keep it as a curiosity, so that I know, writing now, that I am not doing it an injustice.

We had barely occupied our old quarters in Sackville Street five or six weeks when business of her own called Ethel Fortescue to Paris.

Her tenant had gone out, and she had determined to go back and either find another or else herself permanently take up

her abode as heretofore in her own little flat.

And it was arranged that if she decided on the latter course I should go over and join her for a time before making any final arrangements on my own part.

So matters rested for a week or two.

CHAPTER III.

THE week or two passed without anything definite occurring, and consequently I, as they say in the City, wound up arrangements in Sackville Street, and started to join Ethel in Paris.

Her flat was a charming little *entresol* in the Rue Royale, and I now began to understand how delightful life in Paris can be if you can only take things light-heartedly.

Our enjoyments were simple and innocent enough; but to me they seemed endless and infinite. We used to explore

the quaint suburbs. We penetrated the vistas of the upper Seine. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

Let me explain to any young gentleman about town — a Guardsman, or a clerk at the Foreign Office, or a fashionable curate with an eye to a bishopric — what I mean.

He will tell you that he has lived in London for six or seven years, and knows it thoroughly. Does he? Put him a few of the following questions:

Has he ever been to Rosherville in the season of roses, or to the huge lake at Hendon in the season of frost and bearing ice?

He may perhaps own to the "Spaniards," but has he ever dined at "Jack Straw's Castle?"

He will talk about Windsor Forest, but of Epping he is entirely ignorant. He

has dined at Greenwich, but Purfleet, one of the most charming places in all the Home Counties, is a *terra incognita* to him.

Why need I pile up a list of names, such as Edmonton, and Ware, and the Rye House? London lies in the centre of the most lovely scenery in England, and yet Londoners are profoundly ignorant of the fact.

“One green field, sir,” said Johnson to Boswell, “is to a man of intelligence exactly like any other green field, sir. I and you do not want to look at green fields, sir; let us take a walk down Fleet Street.”

Your modern Parisian is as ignorant and as prejudiced as Johnson himself. His state of mind is very much that of the old navigator, who regarded the land

as a place where you cashed your advance notes, drew your pay, and went ashore for a spree, and where potatoes were grown, and salt pork and beef reared for the benefit of seafaring men.

More cosmopolitan in our tastes, Mrs. Fortescue and I, having our time at our own command, found Paris delightful. We ransacked it, explored it, made our way into the outlying country, and every day discovered something fresh—something of which when we got back to the Rue Royale we invariably found that the recognised guide-books and authorities had nothing to tell us. In fact, Ethel proposed one evening that we should write a book between us to be called “Undiscovered Paris,” dedicate it “Aux Parisiens,” and, as the Americans say, “realise” on its sale.

And thus our days slipped away delight-

fully. It was one perpetual holiday with always a something new.

Chance at last brought a relief to this happy, dreamy monotony.

We had been to some steeplechases at Auteuil, and there Ethel met an old friend of hers. Somehow or other all her friends were invariably old friends.

He was a Russian—a certain Prince Balanikoff—to whom it had been for some reason or other suggested by the Imperial Chancellerie that a little travel would do his health all the good in the world. Let me describe him under the mixed aspects in which he presented himself to me.

In the first place, as to my own judgment, with regard to some particulars of which I cannot possibly be mistaken.

The Prince was anywhere between thirty-

five and forty-five years of age. He was immensely tall and immensely big, with broad shoulders. His features were by no means pleasant. They were markedly Kalmuk. He had a heavy jaw, a low, narrow forehead, thick lips, a nose not so much shapeless as flat—as if some sculptor had first modelled in the clay, and then crushed it in disgust—heavy eyebrows, and little, piercing, almond-shaped eyes.

He spoke all languages, even English, with equal fluency, and with a sufficiently impartial pronunciation; and he had all that polish of manner which I suppose has given rise to the old proverb, that if you scratch a Russian gentleman, you will draw the blood of a Tartar savage.

I need only add that he was obviously incapable of truth unless with a serious object, or by way of amusing himself

with a novelty, and that he was extremely entertaining.

Englishmen call themselves cosmopolitan. Americans laugh at us English as insular, much as an Englishman from St. James's would laugh at the best man in all Tristan d'Acunha. Russians laugh, and laugh very fairly and justly, at the United States, with New York for its St. Petersburg, and Boston, that "hub of the universe," where the axis of the earth visibly sticks out through the earth's surface, for its Moscow, and the Boston Philosophical Institute (if that be its name), for its Kremlin.

The Prince called on us the next day, and our acquaintance soon improved, so that he became one of the four men whom I could say I had really known. I may at once put aside my late husband and

the Very Reverend the Dean. It is more difficult to institute any comparison between Prince Balanikoff and George Sabine. I can only suggest it by saying that each was a perfect specimen of his type, the one of an English gentleman of old family, the other of a Tartar Prince with unmeasured estates, and unexhausted mines and forests.

Amongst the Prince's other cosmopolitan accomplishments, he possessed the art of driving four-in-hand. Amongst his pet toys at Paris, was, in addition to his box at the Opera, an exquisite little steam launch on the Seine. What with the Opera, and long drives on the roof of the drag, and delightful runs in the launch on the river, we hardly ever needed to complain that we had lost a day.

And why need I trouble myself about

what the English world in London, or even the Parisian world, which is smaller and more lenient, might say or think?

My position was quite secured. I could do as I pleased, and I intended to do so. I was free to take up the Prince if I pleased, and to throw him over again when I pleased and how.

Society, in the strictest sense of the term, was closed to me. As the divorced wife of an Ambassador, I had the doors of every Court in Europe hopelessly shut in my face; and, as I now knew, beyond the circle of the Court there is no society in any capital of Europe.

Your richest *roturier* sets aside certain nights of his *salon* for the Court circle, and others for the remainder of his necessary acquaintance. The two great circles may meet; they may even, in geometrical

phraseology, touch; but they never intersect.

The etiquette of the "Almanach de Gotha" may be as devoid of real meaning as the pedantries of heraldry. But it is none the less an appreciable factor in human life.

Not even the Church of Rome, which freely dispenses the sacrament of matrimony, will recognise as Princess at the Court of the Vatican the morganatic wife of a Prince, lawfully married by all the most sacred rights of the Church.

I might have seen what was coming. To be more exact, I should say that I ought to have seen it. To be strictly truthful, I will own that I had seen it, but had simply shut my eyes to it.

What happened fell out upon this fashion; and, as Russians have very little

sentiment about them, I can put the story plainly and straightforwardly.

The Prince one day did me the honour, in the most faultless English, and with a considerable amount of more or less sincere Muscovite passion, of laying his heart and three hundred thousand francs a year at my feet.

His frankness was something refreshing. He could not marry, he explained, without the permission under his sign manual of the Czar himself, who would never consent to the union of the representative of a family allied to the Romanoff with the daughter of an English priest, however exalted in his holy calling.

There was besides a little difficulty in the fact that his own wife happened unfortunately to be still alive, and that her father, although not of very exalted birth,

held a position of the highest trust and confidence in the Imperial Chancellerie. Money, however, was the merest trifle. He would deposit a sum with the Rothschilds or any other French or English house sufficient to secure me a yearly income of three hundred thousand francs, and I could to-morrow select and furnish any *hôtel* in Paris that took my fancy.

All this was said as plainly and as brutally as if he had been talking to any member of *la haute cocotterie*, and yet with the most imperturbable grace and polish.

I remember only two ideas—if I can so term them—that flashed through my mind. One was to ask myself what I had done to merit this insult, or if I could in any possible way have given him the idea that I had been laying myself open to do it.

The other was an almost insane desire to kill him as he stood there, leaning with all his great length against the mantel-piece, and twisting his watch-chain into knots between his great fingers.

I believe I should have been idiotic enough to have done as much if a pistol had been lying ready to my hand; and I am quite sure that it would have been one of those cases in which the late Maître Lachaud would have secured a triumphant acquittal.

Luckily, there was no pistol, or, indeed, any other weapon more dangerous than a paper-knife at hand; and so, not caring to trust myself to French, I addressed him in my own tongue.

I began by telling him that he was a coward to insult me as he had done, and that, if I had lacqueys within call, I would

have him thrust out. This, I said, he might take as my definite answer and as my final answer, since I unhappily knew no Englishmen in Paris to call him to account. Meantime he saw the door, and he could go.

And here, I am afraid, I somewhat spoiled the dignity of my harangue by adding that the sooner he went the better.

This, no doubt, was vulgar; but I think, on the other hand, that I can fairly plead I was excited.

I cannot tell whether this outburst took him by surprise or not. I must only presume it did; for he would have hardly provoked it if he had foreseen it.

As there was clearly nothing else to do, he said, without the least expression of irritation, that he deeply regretted the unfortunate misunderstanding which had occurred, and the whole blame of which

he was frankly willing to accept. And he then made me a most profound, and at the same time graceful bow, and departed in the most natural manner, and without the least approach to anything like discomposure or loss of dignity.

As the door closed behind him, I threw myself on the sofa, and, instead of fainting, burst out laughing. Then my thoughts whirled round suddenly. The memory of George Sabine flashed through my mind as a streak of lightning flashes through a pitchy dark sky.

After the lightning follows the thunder and then the rain. I began to sob, and then burst out crying passionately.

When I recovered myself, I began to wonder dreamily, what sort of advice the Very Reverend, the Dean would have given me under all the circumstances.

I may have been doing that worthy man an injustice; but I came to the conclusion that he would have urged that there was much in the past history of the Prince which called for pity rather than for anger; that his affection was evidently sincere; that he was no doubt anxious, under my better influence, to lead a new and a higher life; that it was not for mortal man to too severely judge his fellow; that the manner of my refusal had been, to say the least, uncharitable, if not actually unchristian; that from a mere worldly point of view, I had perversely sacrificed a very brilliant future with infinite opportunities in it of usefulness and good; and that the Greek Church differed so slightly in its tenets from our own, that he for one never despaired of seeing, even in his own lifetime, the reconciliation

of the two, in which happy event he should be able to exclaim with the aged Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Ethel returned she was bubbling over with little details. She had been here, and she had been there; and in one or two shops she had seen some wonderful bargains, and there had been even more than this.

“Only fancy, Miriam, I was coming from the Rue de la Paix, and was crossing the Place Vendôme, when I ran almost full tilt into a young Englishman, who looked at me—at *me*, my dear. Well, I smiled demurely, much as a Queen might smile to a bow, and he followed me all along the Rue St. Honoré—shying horribly when I looked in at the

jewellers' windows, until we reached the end of the street. Then—I couldn't help it—he touched his soft felt hat most politely, and said in Ollendorf, that 'It was making a beautiful day.' So what did I do? I kept my countenance, and answered him in English with a French accent. 'Naughty little boy! go home at once, or I will write and tell the Proctors and the examining chaplain to his holiness the Bishop.' My child, you should have seen the little parson make tracks."

When we had finished laughing over this defeat of the church militant, I turned to more serious matters.

"We must really take counsel together, Ethel. I have had this morning, a proposal which has fairly bewildered and disgusted me."

"Good gracious!"

“I feel pretty much as the Dean might have felt three years ago if the Prime Minister had dropped from Heaven after the fashion of a thunderbolt, straight through the roof, and alighted at the hearthrug at the Vicarage, and had then said, without any attempt at preliminary warning: “Mr. St. Aubyn, you are the ablest man in the whole Church. Mr. St. Aubyn, I will make you a bishop to-morrow, only it must be on the distinct understanding that you live on prison diet—no wine, no beer, no pastry, gruel four days a week, and on the other three bread, and a quarter of a pound of meat! What would the Dean have said?”

“Perhaps, my dear,” replied Mrs. Fortescue, “he may at some time have read of His Excellency, Don Sancho Panza, Governor of the Island of Barataria. If so, he would most certainly have declared

straight out that he would prefer to have the stipend of Ossulston raised to five hundred a year, and to go back to it and get drunk every night with his crony the churchwarden, as you tell me he used to do."

"I don't get tipsy with you, my dear Ethel; but your opinion is sound all the same. If you had been at my shoulder just now, you would have told me to do exactly what I have done."

And I then told her, as briefly as possible, all that had taken place with Prince Balanikoff.

"Well, Miriam, it is just the impudence of these vagabonds. They live among their serfs, and they think that they have only to throw their handkerchief, or to show the shadow of their little finger. And, on the other hand, you know,"

and here she dropped into a meditative tone of voice, "he was certainly very straightforward. What he said about the Rothschilds was perhaps brutal, but eminently satisfactory.

"What he said about its being impossible for him to marry without the permission of the Emperor, and equally impossible to obtain that permission to the marriage in question happens, although it comes from a Russian, to be strictly true. Of that I can assure you there is no manner of doubt whatever; and when he told you he was married already, I think you may pretty safely adopt the rule of English lawyers, which I understand to be that all admissions are evidence against the party who makes them, and may fairly be construed in the most

adverse sense. And yet in spite of all this, my dear Miriam, I declare that if I had been you I should have thought twice, You see, of course, it is no good blinking at matters. We must look them in the face. for time and tide do not wait for any of us.

“In a worldly point of view you would have gained considerably by coinciding with—shall I say—these insulting proposals. Of course, dear Miriam, you have done the right thing. About that there is no manner of doubt. And if poor George Sabine were alive it would have been a very different matter. But he isn't alive, and I think you were a little hard upon the Russian. After his own barbarous fashion, and according to the best of those Northern Lights which do duty in his

wretched country for a sun, he meant to act on the square. He may have been brutal personally. Most of those Tartars are. But a Russian is never a cad, and he is always generous. I fancy very much that your Prince could have taught our own Ambassador at St. Petersburg a lesson in manners as well as in a good many other things."

"But do you seriously mean," I cried, starting to my feet, "that you would have entertained his infamous proposal for a moment?"

"My dear, you mustn't force words upon me that beg the whole thing. In the first place, the proposal was made to you calmly enough and in the most courteous manner possible. And then, too, it was made to yourself. It was not as if the Prince had gone to the Dean and

asked him to sell you straight out for a high price. You are not fair on the man."

"Not fair on him!"

"Let us just admit," she continued, "for the mere sake of argument, that he is taken with you. Without flattery, there are few men who would not be; and Russians are extremely impulsive. He couldn't marry you. Why should you blame him so severely for blurting out the truth in his own fashion, without any lying or beating about the bush? You may have done wisely or unwisely; it is for you to judge, not for me. You may have done rightly or wrongly, but you have no right whatever to complain of having been insulted. The man told you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and I should like to know what more you would have had from him?"

“Then you would seriously have considered what he said?”

“If I had been you, dear Miriam, I answer yes. If it had been myself, I should not have considered what he said at all. I am afraid I should have jumped at it. It is so hard to live comfortably, and a nice little *rente* of three hundred thousand francs goes such a very long way.”

“You are then really in earnest?”

“Never more so in my life, my child, and now let us have a cup of tea.”

With the cup of tea we tacitly allowed the matter to drop. Each of us thoroughly knew the mind of the other, and when there is an insuperable difference of opinion at the very outstart, you must remember that life is short, and that it is worse than waste of time, the most precious of all divine gifts to man, to keep a discussion

going which cannot possibly end in any useful result.

As the Dean used to say, “De principiis disputantibus non est ratio.” If you cannot agree as to what is a straight line and what is a point, it is idle to link arms and endeavour to cross the fateful *pons asinorum*.

CHAPTER V.

No more talking over matters with Ethel Fortescue would have altered the position an inch. I understood her point of view thoroughly, and she knew I did so. She understood mine. We were far too good friends, and too sincerely attached to one another to quarrel, especially over what was entirely my own affair. And, each of us in her own way, we were more like men than women, regarding friendship as a very rare and precious thing which must not be broken by differences of opinion — opinion being a

transitory matter, and liable to sudden changes and shifts of the wind, or to periods of entire calm, such as you get in that horrible region the Doldrums. Whereas friendship, like the trade winds, always blow steadily in a direction which can be anticipated and consequently is not to be made light of, or treated as a matter of indifference and a disturbing element in your plans.

A compromise, however, was possible. I had my fifteen hundred a year. As to that there could be no possible doubt. If we are to come to the details of household management, of which my sad and long experience at Ossulston had taught me only too much, two women can live together as cheaply as one can live by herself. Consequently I was not hampered in my calculation by my loyalty to Mrs.

Fortescue, whom I could welcome at any time and upon any notice.

So I decided to go to England, and to live decorously and respectably. Not that I suggest for a moment that I had ever done otherwise. This resolution determined upon, we parted company with honestly sincere expressions of goodwill and affection. Ethel went off to Carlsbad; I made my way to Leamington. And now begins the story, which, I fear, I must much abridge in its telling, of "*La Juive Errante.*"

I had been at Leamington about two months. I lived in unexceptionable lodgings. I kept a little pony-carriage at the adjacent livery stables. I lodged the largest sum at my disposal at the Joint Stock Bank—for at Joint Stock

Banks every clerk tells the affairs of the customer to all his friends. I engaged a maid, a bloused Warwickshire woman of thirty, whose orders were to accompany me wherever I might go, and, by way of colour, to always carry an umbrella, or a box of water-colours, or some such lumber.

After about two months people began to call upon me. First came the wife of a doctor, whom a convenient chill and sore throat had obliged me to summon.

I praised her husband's skill and tact. I drew a comparison between him and the great Sir Timothy Carver, by no means favourable to that most distinguished surgeon. I regretted that the sphere of her husband's abilities should be bounded by Leamington, and I sent her away radiant.

Within a week I was asked to dinner, and I went.

I was dressed in black with a high neck trimmed with some of my most valuable lace. I wore a small cap—a cap of protest I might almost call it—and my only jewels were a black pearl brooch and pendants which, I believe, upon my honour, some of the ladies took for jet.

I was a success; and when the men came up from their cigarettes and five-year-old port, bringing the full aroma with them, I could see that I had made my mark, for they all clustered round me.

Amongst them, however, was one who claimed acquaintance with me, reminding me that I knew him. I, of course, replied that I had not that honour.

“Ah, my lady,” he said, with what was meant for a sentimental smile, “the months come and go, and perhaps it is a surprise to each of us to meet the other. My name,”

he added rubbing his hands, "is Jenkins. When I first made your ladyship's acquaintance, I was only managing clerk in Lincoln's Inn Fields to Messrs. Nisi, Slowcoach, and Absolute, Sir Henry's solicitors. I am sure you will be glad to hear that I am now a partner in the firm. In fact"—and here he dropped his voice to an odiously confidential whisper—"I am down here at this moment apparantly on pleasure. No man likes pleasure better than myself; but I never let business interfere with it, your ladyship. And I do not mind telling you that our firm has intrusted me with some very delicate negotiations, much reminding me of those in which I had the honour of being concerned on your own account. What a very strange world and a very small world after all it is!"

Now of course I ought to have conciliated this little snob. I ought to have

asked him to call upon me, and to bring his wife, if he had one, with him; but I was utterly unable to do more than to reply frigidly that I remembered the circumstances as perfectly as himself; so perfectly indeed that I had no need to be reminded of them. And I then found myself, without knowing whether he possessed one, actually asking him whether his wife derived any benefit from the Leamington waters, and whether he found the time and had the inclination to ride with the — hounds.

“My wife, your ladyship,” he commenced at once, “finds the waters do her a deal of good. She suffers from obstinate liver complaint, for which I am told they are invaluable. I don’t ride myself, especially after hounds, but we have very pleasant drives in the morning. We’ve been already

to Warwick and Kenilworth, and we mean to do the neighbourhood thoroughly before we go. We are here in quite a humble way, or else I would really ask your ladyship to call, and to do me the honour of being introduced to Mrs. Jenkins." And at this point happily our conversation was interrupted.

I left almost immediately. I felt that I was threatened by two dangers. One was entirely my own fault; stopping at Leamington as Mrs. Chichester—the *nom de guerre* I had chosen—I had been addressed and recognised as Lady Craven. After all, however, he had only said, when I came to think of it, "my lady" and "your ladyship."

That was well enough so far, and saved me from my blunder in not having at once taken him into my confidence, and given

him warning. But then, what a terrible prospect! Am I for ever to be taking everybody into my confidence and giving them warning, from the solicitor's managing clerk down to the dressmaker's fitter on? It would be better to go to Kamschatka at once. Luckily he had not used my name. The first danger was over; but he would be sure to tell his wife everything as soon as he went home; and if he did so Leamington would be impossible for me. And this second danger soon proved a reality.

Some few days after I went in the morning to call on the wife of a clergyman whose acquaintance I had made. He was only a curate, but he had a sufficient private income, and lived in a big house in Lansdowne Terrace. I knew they were in, because, as I knocked at the door, I saw

the excellent lady put her head over the blind in the ground-floor window.

I then saw her two eldest and eligible daughters successively do the same. Indeed all three of them had a good stare at me. .

When the servant came to the door, it was to inform me, with the obvious hesitation of a rustic *ingénue* ordered to tell a lie, that her mistress was not at home.

It is a dreary story to give in detail. Let me summarise it by saying that exactly the same thing happened at half-a-dozen other houses. Scandal flies through Leamington, or through any other English watering-place, like wild-fire through a field of ripe corn. I found myself in Leamington an outcast and a pariah.

I asked another curate to tea, giving him a week's notice. He was too truthful

a little man to tell a downright lie, and he piteously pleaded the many calls on his time.

This was absurd, as he notoriously lived upon his parishioners, making his tea and supper out a compensation for his mid-day bread and cheese and table-beer.

He was a good little fellow, and would no doubt have been only too delighted to have come, so far as he himself was concerned. But he was weak and terrified. He could not bring himself to say, "Neither do I accuse thee;" and if he paid me the compliment of writing upon the ground, I was not present to see him do as much, and so was in no ways solaced by the operation.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER the pitiful defection of my little curate, there was evidently nothing to be done but to leave Leamington, and to leave it at its best, in the very height of the hunting season.

Then arose the question where to go next. I had begun to acquire a semi-nautical habit of consulting maps. So I took down my atlas, and turned over the map of England.

My choice was somewhat narrowed, as I had resolved not to try the sea, except in the very last resource. The sea now

only reminded me of George Sabine, and I hated the very sight of it as passionately as I had once loved it.

Ultimately I fixed on the Cathedral town of Salchester. Salchester is of immense antiquity. Its last two syllables point to its having once been an old Roman garrison. Its first, probably to the existence of salt works there; although upon this point antiquarians and county historians are divided.

I decided to stop at the principal hotel for a few days, and then to take lodgings, the best that could be got in the Close itself, or at any rate, as near to the Cathedral as possible; to engage a maid in the town, who would go about telling everybody exactly what I chose to let her see or imagine; and to attend the Cathedral services regularly.

Always think out your plans thoroughly. You thus save an immense amount of time and friction afterwards. And if circumstances baffle your plans, you have only lost an hour or so of quiet thought, which, after all, is in itself a most useful mental gymnastic.

Having thought out my plans, I went down to Salchester, stopped for the night at the "Bull," and the next morning secured the very lodgings I wanted, my landlady being no less a person than the wife of one of the lay clerks, or, as they are profanely termed, singing men.

My conduct was method and circumspection itself. I breakfasted at eight. I attended the Cathedral service at ten. I had my little dinner at two. At four, I attended the afternoon service. Then I had tea, and was careful to go to bed at the

orthodox and respectable British hour of ten to the minute.

My landlady was charmed with me, and was too well satisfied with the way in which things went on, to make herself at all inquisitive. Even the most uneducated Englishwoman has a certain amount of tact and *savoir faire*, if you give her as little trouble as possible, and wink at her petty deviations from the strict paths of rectitude and honesty.

This is why, as a rule, a man in furnished lodgings never quarrels with his landlady, and a woman almost invariably manages to do so.

Well, things went on smoothly enough. Before a fortnight was over, the wife of one of the Minor Canons called upon me. I had forgotten, by-the-way, to state that I was passing as Mrs. Allen, and had re-

solved, instead of risking troublesome falsehoods, to evade or else entirely decline any conversation as to my past life. As I paid my way in current money of the realm, my task was comparatively easy.

Before long, I was in the magic circle of the Close, and had actually dined at the Deanery itself, where the Dean, who, unlike my own very reverend father, was really a learned man, and without a grain of worldliness in his composition, was charmed with me.

I was particularly careful not to irritate the women by my dress. I wore always the plainest frocks, of a very simple and ordinary kind. I also, although my hair was as luxuriant as ever, adopted a most discreet little cap. My rustic Abigail always came early to fetch me home. When any of the *grandes dames par le monde*

ecclésiastique honoured me with a call, I regaled them with tea which I knew they could not match, as I got it from Twining's, and with the best cake and hot-house fruit that the town afforded.

If the men came, I would have claret on the table. Parsons are, as a rule, good judges of claret, and you are seldom amiss in offering them a large glass of Tanqueray's Larose, and pressing them to take a second.

Claret, I explained, was ordered me; and I had indeed been recommended a variety called Haut Brion, which proved, however, I found, to be beyond the range of my somewhat limited purse. Of champagne there was not a trace, and I found life perfectly possible without it. I think what pleased the men most, was my undeniably good wine. The women were

charmed when they discovered that I had among my effects very valuable jewels which I never wore, although, of course, there was no reason why I should not do so; and they were still more charmed when they found that I did not set my cap at their husbands and lovers.

Within a few weeks I had established my footing securely. The men all swore by me, in so far and after such fashion as swearing is permissible to ecclesiastical dignitaries. The women had ceased to be jealous, and, if anything, exhorted me to vary the monotony of my seclusion by a little harmless dissipation, some of them going so far as to suggest croquet. Lawn tennis was not as yet considered sufficiently serene and sedate for an old-going Cathedral town.

My rise at last reached its culmination

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He had edited Newton's "*Principia*" and the "*Epistle to the Hebrews*," preached a number of indifferent University sermons,

and, after a brief visit to Palestine with a "personally conducted tour," written a volume called "Galilee and Gennesareth," which reviewers had not even condescended to tear in pieces.

People said that if he lived long enough he would probably be Archbishop, as he was in every way so eminently safe. By which they meant that whatever his opinions might be, religious, political, or social, he kept them profoundly to himself.

His wife I can deal with almost in a sentence. Mrs. Johnson was one of the numerous daughters of a poor Irish peer. She was vivacious and agreeable, and had evidently once been extremely good-looking. Beyond this one could only say of her what the stranger told Sam Smiley of his frog—that he could see no more points in him than in any other frog.

The conversation was extremely dull and monotonous. The women talked scandal, or, to do them justice, that comparatively harmless, irrevelant, and discursive kind of scandal known as gossip.

The clergy, and the few country gentlemen who were present, deplored the alarming spread of revolutionary principles; and I could not help noticing the church militant was, as a body, much more truculent than were most laymen.

It was a Bishop, now that I remember, who once got up at a public dinner and declared the satisfaction it would give him to see Mr. Joseph Arch dragged through a horsepond.

The Bishop presently did me the honour of addressing me.

“I hope, Mrs. Allen,” he observed paternally, and with a gesture of the hands

which seemed to indicate an irrational desire to commence the confirmation service at once upon the whole body of his guests, "that you find the air of Salchester suit, what is I fear, and have indeed heard, a delicate constitution."

"Salchester, my lord, suits me in every way. I have actually not had to call in a medical man. I find the air from over the downs as bracing and exhilarating as that of Brighton itself, and the scenery is delightful. I manage to get little drives, and am learning to know the neighbourhood."

"It is a very beautiful neighbourhood," he remarked. "Most of our Cathedrals have been most happily placed, although I fear the credit must be given to the monks who chose the localities long before the Reformation."

Having delivered himself of this as-

tounding piece of ecclesiastical history, he continued :

“A river was necessary to them to provide fish for their fast days, and a sense of duty also impelled them to seek busy centres. It is the necessity of the iron road, and nothing else, that has compelled us to give a bishopric to—let us say—Manchester. We must, of course, move with the times.”

With this profound remark he ran himself down like a clock, and waited helplessly for me to wind him up.

This was by no means a difficult task as I had pretty well got his measure. I talked to him about anything that came first—about the architecture of the Cathedral, about Tintern Abbey and a still more wonderful Abbey which, as

a matter of fact, I only knew from photographs.

Then I paid a tribute to the memory of Bishop Selwyn and asked his lordship, gazing critically at his chest and shoulders, whether he in his time had rowed in the University eight, or whether his studies had made it impossible for him to so aid his *Alma Mater*.

He replied, of course, that he had been warmly pressed to take a thwart in the middle of the boat, but that more serious pursuits had compelled him, like Cæsar, to thrice refuse the crown of laurel.

When you can once get a man who is well past fifty to chatter to you about his physical powers, you have pretty accurately ascertained the length of his

tether, and I in my own mind finished my reckoning up of his lordship by putting him in my mental museum of busts as being at any rate capable of giving my very reverend parent what poor George used to call a stone and a half, and a thorough beating over four miles of flat.

So far then everything was in my favour; the days passed very pleasantly. I procured an old sure-footed pony and a small basket carriage, just such another as I had at Leamington, only more ecclesiastical in its *ensemble* and with less suspicion in its appearance of any sinister intention to go and see the hounds thrown off. This I kept on the famous "gigmanity" principle, and was most careful to let it always be at the disposal of any of the

ladies of the Close. The pony was not one at all likely to run away with them, and they were welcome to let him down for all that I cared, as his knees were badly broken already.

And by these and other similar little devices I managed to get on famously. After all I was doing no wrong. I was leading my own life—a simple, harmless life enough, and being asked no questions, had no occasion to tell any lies.

On the whole I think I really enjoyed my life. I mounted fern cases in my windows, procured myself a piping bullfinch and a magnificent collie, hired a good serviceable piano, and began at last to find the spring returning to my step and the roses to my face, and to think dreamily about those pleasant and lovely places so

exquisitely described to me by poor George Sabine, and even to plan a visit to some of them.

To one or two ladies, who were rather curious about my antecedents, I replied that my husband had been in the consular service and had died abroad under very painful circumstances. And then I would bring out my pocket-handkerchief.

Some of them inclined to the view that he had killed himself with drink; others were in favour of a fatal duel; others of suicide. They fought the matter out among themselves with some waste of time and loss of temper, but none of them came to me a second time begging me to determine the dispute in her favour.

I did not meddle with them in any way. I did not try to eclipse them or to compete with their unmarried sisters or

their elder daughters. So they unanimously came to the conclusion that my life had been a very sad one, and that the manner in which I bore up against my sorrows, together with my unostentatious mode of life, spoke volumes for my resignation, my humility, and my other Christian virtues.

Women are easily managed enough if you will only abstain religiously from anything calculated in the slightest degree to make them jealous.

Thus, then, I became insensibly an institution in the town—a sort of Jackdawess of Rheims. The life was lazy and monotonous, but not, as my life with Sir Henry had been, tedious. And I almost began to wonder whether I might not possibly “long live the pride of that country side, and at last in the odour of sanctity” peacefully depart this life.

And yet, up to now, I had had so much of the *vie orageuse* that Salchester was beginning to weary me almost as thoroughly as Ossulston had ever done, and, as I felt myself growing stronger and more resolute, I began, as do birds of passage, to feel an indefinite craving for motion and freedom.

After all I could return to Salchester at any time I pleased. I had been economising, not as a virtue, but because my income was far beyond the few expenses I incurred. Had I lived up to my means, I should probably have excited suspicion.

Why then should I not give myself a holiday, pleading that unanswerable plea, a craving for sea air?

We had reached that time of the year—

When a blanket wraps the day,
When the rotting woodland drips,
And the leaf is stamped in clay.

The birds of passage had long left; the days were dismal; and yet I, absolute mistress of myself, had been loitering and hesitating instead of turning straight to the sunny South.

I had my boxes packed, left P.P.C. cards, adroitly catching all my friends out, and felt thoroughly happy when I found myself alone in the train being rapidly whirled towards London.

Of course I had written to Ethel to announce my determination, and I had paid my maid two months' wages and given her three or four old dresses. Nothing could have been better arranged; and I felt at last recklessly free and triumphant as I toasted my feet before the fire of my little room in Rawlings' Hotel.

That evening I actually took a small private box, and went in one of the

hotel broughams to the theatre. I wonder if bad habits are hereditary. When I got back to my quarters, I actually found myself ordering a pint of Perrier Jouet and a plate of dry biscuits.

CHAPTER VII.

NEXT morning brought me, with my chocolate, a brief and very welcome letter from Ethel. "Come over as soon as you can," she wrote. "In fact, come at once. I am tired of being here alone, and, need I say, the sight of you would do me good? We can spend a few days here, just long enough to enable you to get what you want, and can then be off at once to the Riviera. I am dying for a gamble and a little sun. The weather here is vile. We need not plunge at all, but I mean to pay some of my bills, and we can enjoy ourselves delightfully in our

own way. I should like to stay at Monte Carlo, unless you prefer Nice or Mentone."

Then, after a little general gossip, and a few rapier thrusts at the expense of my whilom husband, and the very reverend author of my being, the epistle concluded:—

"Do not let the grass grow under your feet (not that anything is likely to grow in London in the snow slush with which I hear you are at present blessed). Hurry over it like Atalanta over the ears of corn. Think of the swallows of Henri Murger and fly South. I have given you lots of advice, and very little news. Of news, indeed, I am barren. I can tell you, however, should it in any way interest you to, as lawyers say, 'be informed and verily believe,' that I have seen several times lately that most excellent Prince Balanikoff. I need scarcely tell you that he has always in-

quired after you with an anxiety that has been far from feigned, and in, I fear, letting concealment like a worm in the bud feed on the well-whiskered cheek with which Nature has so liberally favoured him. I suppose you are still relentless. It is not for me to advise; but male patience, as I found out early in my career, has its limits, and, sooner or later, we shall have him singing, 'If she be not fair for me, what care I how fair she be?' Beside, what says Tennyson, the favourite of all good people? 'Come into the garden, Maud.' So say I. Pack up your traps, Maud, and come with me into the garden of Europe."

Was there ever such a woman?

It was out of the question to say no. Even if it had been in the question, I should have in all human probability have said "yes." My things were already packed.

I had scarcely disturbed them. That evening I was on my way to Paris, and I think no guard's whistle was ever more grateful to my ears than that which started us off from Victoria.

The next few days were devoted to the inevitable toilette, into the details of which I have no intention of entering. Euripides, so I once heard it observed by a most eminent church dignitary at Salchester, has put upon record his conviction that women are wretched creatures.

The two arts, in which they ought to excel, are cookery and millinery, and in each they are hopelessly beaten out of the field by men.

I employed the recognised Prince of Parisian men milliners, who bowed to me,

begged me to walk across the room, to sit down and to repose on a sofa. He then summoned two assistants to measure me, and bowed us out with the polite assurance that the English formality of trying on would be wholly unnecessary.

That evening we held a council of war. Our position was exactly the converse of that of Milton's Adam when turned out of Paradise. The world, it is true, was all before us; but we had no intention whatever of choosing a resting-place, and were about to set off with the lightest of hearts and with no regrets.

It did not take us long to decide; for a while, a short while, we hovered round and round in circles as does a carrier pigeon when it is tossed off. We could not decide between the rival claims of Nice, Mentone, Cannes,

and Monte Carlo itself. Ultimately, in desultory fashion, we decided on Monte Carlo.

"Nice, my child," said Ethel, "is full of boarding schools, pensions, and valetudinarians; it is a sort of French Brighton—sunny, windy, glaring, and disreputable. Mentone is about as lively as Ventnor; it is a city of the dying. Cannes is too far from Monaco. Let us make no bones about the matter and go boldly to Monte Carlo."

"You know best," I answered; "we will go." And thus it came to pass that within four or five days we found ourselves comfortably seated at the *table d'hôte* at the "Hôtel de Paris."

"The *habitués*, my dear," said Ethel, "dine at the restaurant, which costs very little more, is ten times more amusing, and

certainly gives you a far better dinner. But you and I are young and innocent, dividing our innocence and our guilt between us in any proportion that you please ; so to-night we dine at the *table d'hôte*, and then adjourn to the rooms and have a little flutter.

“To-morrow we will dine in the restaurant. By the time we have finished, the high players, who, like the great Lewis Samuels, always go the maximum, are beginning to show themselves, and you will see play in earnest. No mere tourists there, but players who mean business, and have come on business, and to whom their personal expenses are a mere incident of the day—little more than an extra bottle of champagne, or a morning drive over to Mentone.”

Acting on her advice we looked in at the room after dinner, and, for the first

time in my life, I saw public gambling. As conducted at Monte Carlo it seems to me to be decorous, dull, and strictly honest. The disreputable element, which has made it almost impossible for an English gentleman to run his horses in his own name, is entirely wanting, or, at any rate, is not visible upon the surface.

You can distinguish, of course, between the punters who are very terribly in earnest and those of the same category who are only amusing themselves. If you are familiar with faces, the rooms are a study. You will see a most respectable peer, perfectly well known at Exeter Hall and other such places, and a subscriber to every philanthropic movement. To your great surprise he plunges rather heavily; you forget that in England he dare not be seen on a racecourse, or to touch a pack of cards

even in his own club. So he comes over to Monte Carlo for a fortnight, and, as the saying is, lets off steam.

Why should he not? Was it not one of the Church's most eminent dignitaries, who reported for the *Thunderer* of Printing House Square, the amicable little meeting between Sayers and Heenan at Farnborough Heath?

Standing near his lordship is a leading Q.C., certain, before long, to be a judge, and who, on the principle of lightly gotten lightly gone, is throwing away guineas he has received for cases in which he may or may not have condescended to appear.

A little farther off, is a favourite jockey, who knows far too much of his business to risk his money on the English turf. In animated conversation with him, and covering

his money with their own, partly from superstitious faith in his sagacity, and partly because they are too indolent to watch the game, on their own account, and prefer to back their companion's luck, is a rising young Cabinet Minister, and the gentleman who is best known in Europe as the Prince of the money-lenders, and who, having commenced life by peddling jewellery, and lending ten-pound notes to impecunious subalterns in marching regiments, is now the Rothschild of his profession, dealing only with Princes and heirs to entailed estates, and laughing at the idea of any transaction under a couple of thousand pounds.

Other types are infinite. Among these *mutatis mutandis* the old saying of Lord George Bentinck, that it is only on the turf and under it that all men are equal, comes

out in its fullest and most repulsive force. For "women," as Browning has it, "models of their sex, society's chief ornament," are to be seen, seated side by side, with the hardest *cocottes* of every capital, race, and tongue, actually rubbing shoulders with them, and discussing the unprecedented run upon red, or the appalling frequency with which zero has turned up since the last croupier has been spinning the ball.

You must not allow anything to surprise you at Monte Carlo. Women with lovely faces and sweet expressions, who look angels, are simply demons in disguise. Men, who stake five thousand francs on a simple turn of the roulette-ball, are often risking more than their annual income. Men, who look like Princes of the Blood Royal, are sometimes couriers out of place, and Princes themselves occasionally look like

chiffonniers. There is no law of probability in the place where Queen Fortune reigns supreme. You must at once get rid of all preconceived ideas of social distinction. Here there is nothing of the kind. Luck is King at Monte Carlo, and to him only is paid homage. As for birth, position, titles, and beauty, they go for nothing. The man who breaks the bank, be he Jew, Turk, Infidel, or Heretic, is as worthy of respect as the greatest sovereign in the world.

“*Vive la Veine*,” is the national cry of the naughty little principality, and those who have none are altogether out of it. Big sums change hands at Monte Carlo; and, while I was there, I saw a young English officer lose three thousand pounds at *Trente et quarante* in about twenty minutes. And this made but little stir

in a place where a Russian Princess or a London usurer will lose or win twice as much every day of the week, or where "a person" will "dispose of" a pair of diamond ear-rings in the morning for ten thousand francs, and in the evening be compelled to borrow a louis from "a lady friend" to pay for her dinner.

I did not play on this occasion, I contented myself with looking over Ethel's shoulder. When my companion rose to leave, she stood, so she told me, five hundred francs to the bad, and added laughingly, that, if she did not pull it off with a full revenge on the morrow, she should give up gambling for ever, and take, in terrible sober earnest, to Dorcas meetings, which she had somewhere heard or read were useful for reproof, for example, for

warning, and for instruction in righteousness.

“Those may not perhaps be the exact words, my dear Miriam,” she said; “but, anyhow, they convey the spirit of the thing, and more than that is what nobody has any right whatever to ask.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next evening we went into the rooms again. I had made up my mind to risk a trifle for that one occasion, and for that one occasion only. I knew that this is what gamblers always tell you; but I am certain that on my part the intention was sincere, and would have been carried out, whatever might have been the results of the night's play.

The results were certainly such as to astonish even myself. My little capital seemed to grow in a manner simply marvellous.

At first I had played on what I suppose I imagined to be a method; but I became bewildered with my success, and very soon found myself playing as recklessly as any young shopman out for a bank-holiday, and throwing at cocoa nuts.

And yet the more reckless my play, the more fortune favoured me. I became excited. Any human being would have been as much under the circumstances. I increased my stakes and kept on winning. I became dimly aware that other persons were watching my lead and following it.

At last, out of mere weariness, I stopped and rose. There was an immediate fight for my chair, and I escaped with my pockets crammed. I found afterwards at the hotel that I had won, as a matter of fact, nearly twenty thousand francs, so nearly that the difference is not worth detail.

I left this little treasure with the proprietor of the hotel, where the news of my good fortune had spread before me. He was most gracious; insisted on counting the plunder before me, that there might be no mistake, and then locked it securely in his safe. This formality concluded, Ethel and I ordered up to our sitting-room, at her suggestion, prawn sandwiches and a bottle of champagne.

“I like to enjoy the good things of this life, along with you,” she said very frankly. “It is so amusing to think how furious the Dean would be if he could see us, and it makes me wonder whether his credit is what it ought to be in the Cathedral Close, or whether they have by this time, as I very much suspect, begun to find him out. The gaiters that cast the most imposing shadow do not, by any means,

always carry the lightest heart; and were the Dean to bet me his gaiters on that assertion, I would willingly stake my best boots against them, and throw my bottom dollar into the bargain. And now, my excellent Miriam, it's time to sleep on our luck, and to-morrow morning we will have a lovely little drive over to Nice."

Next morning the weather was uncertain, or we should, without any doubt, have carried out Ethel's suggestion. As it was, we were guided by the barometer, and took a stroll in the gardens of the Casino, the flowers of which are perfect; but their only zoological curiosity, a small cage of ring-doves, typical, I suppose, of the innocence, purity, and general guilelessness of the little principality.

We had hardly covered a hundred yards before we saw Prince Balanikoff approach-

investigation. I need not go through the roll, for any man in England can become a peer if he will only make up his mind to the effort. One of your peers advertises in your penny papers that to avoid commission and to simplify business he will supply his own coals direct from his own collieries in his own carts for cash on delivery. Another, if I remember aright, recently figured as something much worse than a money-lender—as, what is termed in the cant of the trade, a tout and ‘bonnet’ for money-lenders. One or two have undergone very recently *travaux forcés* for disgraceful offences against ordinary honesty and morality. One”—here he burst out laughing—“lived in Spain on an annual stipend allowed him by a vendor of quack pills and ointment. He was sufficiently a gentleman to appreciate the irony of his situa-

tion and to seek retirement in the orange groves of Andalusia. I hope if he is dead that his successor in the title continues the pills and ointment with equal faith."

How could I answer him when it was all true ?

"I wonder," he asked himself, meditatively, "what Francis Joseph would say if one of his Princes were to sell ginger-beer upon commission, or to turn cab-proprietor and advertise as such, or to accept a yearly pension for a testimonial stating that he is convinced of the virtues of a new soap, or of a patent liver pill, or of a specific against premature baldness. I really believe his Imperial Majesty would banish him for life. You are funny people, you English. You are, the ladies of course excepted, the best hated and

the most heartily despised nation in the world; and, on my honour, you deserve it. Your only strength is among your *canaille*, who make splendid soldiers, sailors, and prize-fighters, and yet even their morals lose the true Spartan simplicity of type under the influence of the first breath of fresh air that blows over a race-course. But the English ladies are sufficient atonement for all the sins and grossnesses of their husbands, brothers, and sons. They are perfection itself."

I murmured a few deprecatory sentences in answer to this flood of invective; but they were fashioned feebly, and finished lamely. It was for this very chance that he had been waiting.

"You will not answer me seriously," he said, "because you are still angry. No

doubt I deserve your anger. I spoke as one who is full of new wine, and I can only claim to be forgiven on a pure appeal to mercy. You may impose on me any condition, or bind me by any pledge. But out of your charity you can surely find room for pardon."

"Let us think no more of anything that may have happened, Prince," I replied. "Mine is not a long memory."

"So be it. So be it," he laughed, not at all lightly, but with all the air, at any rate, of genuine relief. "Life is too short that we should waste it, and lose possible friendships over small misunderstandings which a word can put right. Let us," and here he raised his voice, "ask Mrs. Fortescue and Prince Melyanis what they think."

“Think of what?” asked Prince Melyanis, swinging round at once upon his heel.

“Of the weather,” was the imperturbable answer. “Lady Craven thinks there is rain about. I, for my part, declare that I never yet saw in all my experience promise in skies so fair of fairer weather to follow.”

It is positively ludicrous with what persistency, I find myself haunted by the same idea. Here is a man who has never been selected even as an attaché. And my late husband is at this moment making ducks and drakes, as the little boys say, of all England's vast interests at the Court of the largest Empire in the world.

I burst out laughing and forgot everything. And in a few seconds we were re-

tracing our steps four abreast, chatting on every conceivable subject, and, so far as any listener could have gathered, deeply interested in our conversation.

CHAPTER IX.

WE stayed some few weeks longer in the little principality ostensibly ruled by the Prince of Monaco and, as its American visitors say, "bossed" or "run" by those philanthropists, Monsieur Blanc's successors.

It was now the early part of January, which is perhaps the best time of the year for Monte Carlo, but I felt the migratory instinct on me again, and determined to leave.

There are, after all, only two modes of life. One is that of the barn-door fowl;

the other that of the albatross. One is that of the individual who never seems to trouble himself further about the world beyond the limits of his parish. The other is that of Ulysses, who found it impossible to rest from travel. For my own part, I felt the spirit of Ulysses strong in me, and to the obvious annoyance of Ethel, although she took the thing good-naturedly, I determined to leave the Riviera for anywhere subject to the fixed date of my return to my little Ithaca of Salchester.

We first ran to Venice, of which I could say a good deal were I writing a guide book, or a sentimental journey, and not the story of my own life put in the most plain and unvarnished manner.

Then from Venice we went to Geneva, which they tell me is very much like the

English Lakes, only more so, the Swiss hotel-keepers, who boast themselves the descendants of William Tell, being extortionate, most insolent, and more aggressive than even their Welsh brothers in business.

There are two infallible recipes for the destruction of two very special illusions. If you believe in William Tell and the brave Swiss, try Geneva. If, as I once heard George Sabine say, you believe too much in the happy creed of your childhood, try Palestine.

There are a few English in Switzerland, at Berne, and Zurich, and other such places. They live there because it is cheap, and their children become polyglot. For the rest, Switzerland is one of the world's greatest shams.

We were told that we had come at the

wrong time. This is what you always are told. "It never was such fine weather as it has been for the last three weeks. The rain has only just set in. It is so singular that the fish should be off their feed. Only up to the day before yesterday they were biting magnificently, and gentlemen, who really know nothing of fishing, were pulling them out as fast as they could put in their lines."

Ethel only laughed. "Do you not know the story, Miriam, of the Frenchman who invited his English acquaintance down to his country château for *le sport*? 'If,' said he, 'you do see an old hare with but half of his left ear, fire not at him, *mon brave*, he is the *père de famille*; and should you see an old hare who limps badly, fire not upon her, it is Madame, his wife. But if

you see another hare, young, and *gamin*, fire at him all that you will; it is the little Alphonse, who has mocked me all these months.' Wherever you may go, you never get the game that you are promised.

"I remember dipping into a book once, called 'Try Lapland.' They did try Lapland, and, according to their own admission, they would have been extremely jolly, had it not been that prices for the most ordinary pothouse accommodation were about four times those of Meurice's, and that mosquitoes and other nameless insects all but nibbled away their toes and fingers. No, my dear. Merchants have given up the idea of the North-West Passage. They stick to the old routes of commerce—the Suez Canal alone excepted; and we do not owe the Suez Canal to nature. Let us stick, for ourselves, to the good old places. *Nolo episcopari*

in partibus, which is, being interpreted, let us get back as soon as ever we can to a Christian land."

We accordingly returned to Paris, where I loitered a few days to purchase necklaces; and then, after an affectionate farewell to Ethel, found myself once again *en route* for Salchester, with the roses firmly established in my cheeks.

I think at Salchester they were glad to see me back. I can quite understand that, in some uncertainly defined way, I was a change for them. Anyhow, I was most cordially welcomed. I re-engaged my little maid, laid in a fresh stock of wine, and started once more the washing basket and the broken-kneed pony.

Curiosity had ceased about me. I was a *fait accompli*, and very much by way of fossilising down into such an institution,

that, were the actually authentic details of my life to have been published in a broad sheet, they would have found no credence in the sacred limits of the Close.

The life was very dull, of course; but what would you have?

It was now about the time of the spring equinox, and we were all looking forward to May, when an event occurred which very much altered the whole course of my life so far as it had been hitherto arranged.

There was a certain Minor Canon, the Reverend Mr. Sebastian Meadowsweet, who, one morning after infinite blushes and with considerable gasping and choking as of a newly-landed fish, did me the honour to lay himself morally and physically at my

feet, and to beg that I would bind him to my chariot wheels for ever.

I had a great mind to humour him. Let me give the points in his favour. He had been at Winchester and at Balliol; he was tall, extremely good-looking, and not without claims to be considered an athlete; he had an exquisite tenor voice, and he was as loyal and as simple as Sir Galahad himself; add to this, that he was perhaps a few months—say a couple of years—older than myself.

So far, then, he was certainly eligible, if not, indeed, entirely desirable. Besides, a woman has her caprices. I really liked the man, and I felt that with my money and my help generally, he would soon be something more than a Minor Canon.

His defects were not positive; they were

only due to youth and inexperience. His merits were very sterling, and far outweighed them. Could any woman act otherwise than I did under all the circumstances? I resolved to accept him; and I did, stipulating only that the marriage should be deferred for a few months, and that for some time our intention should be kept a secret from Salchester society.

For a week or two we were very discreet. I went up to London, saw Mr. George Wylie, and laid the case before him, suggesting that it might be worth while to consult some eminent barrister.

He laughed outright, and told me it was a matter of A B C. Whether I was married by banns or by license, my exact position as a divorced woman must be made known. Concealment of it would vitiate either license or banns and make the marriage void, as

would also marriage in an assumed name, whether it was surname or only Christian.

Lastly, he added, that any clergyman could refuse to marry me, and that clergymen had more than once declined to perform the marriage service on the ground that the lady had been divorced, and that they would consequently be giving the sanction of the Church to an act of adultery.

He suggested that we should be married in London, when I could qualify myself by a previous residence at a hotel sufficient to give me a parochial *locus standi*. But that I could be married under any other name than that of Miriam Craven was absolutely out of the question.

His own advice, he added, would be that I should, without the least reserve or hesitation, tell my intended husband the truth.

The truth must, sooner or later, most certainly come out, and it would be just as well to have it out at the beginning and to have done with it.

He was extremely sorry that he had no device of his own to suggest, and for his own part he considered the existing state of the law very infamous; but we must take the law, like all other human institutions, as we find it, and as to its state on this particular point that so concerned myself there could be unfortunately no possible manner of doubt. The thing had been discussed and argued over and over again, until there was simply no more whatever to be said about it.

For himself he was only confirmed in the belief he had always entertained, that the laity are far more tolerant and Christian than the clergy, who, when they

once take to law, seem to be seized with all the spirit of Torquemada in its very worst form.

Now it is all very well to talk pleasantly about Torquemada; but the terrible question stared me in the face—what was I to do?

Most assuredly I could not commit perjury, or what was next door to it. It was equally clear that without committing a gross deception I could not get married. The only thing to do was to take Sebastian into my confidence and tell him everything. The idea terrified me, but the thing had to be done.

I went back to Salchester and for some weeks I lived a life of intolerable torture. I could not bring myself to tell Mr. Meadowsweet all at once. On the other hand I knew what would be said by

everybody of my delay; for, during my absence, our engagement had got wind, and I was congratulated by everybody, from the Bishop and his wife down to my landlady.

My position became at last perfectly intolerable, especially as Sebastian began to urge me to allow him to have the banns published in the Cathedral.

It was idle delaying or hoping that anything would occur to alter the situation, so one day I screwed up my courage resolutely. I was expecting Mr. Meadow-sweet to call and take me out for a walk. Some few minutes before he was due I made myself look my best, fortified myself with a liberal dose of Eau de Cologne and water, and then, when he arrived, pleaded a bad headache which was, in fact, the truth, and assured him that I felt unequal to leaving

the house, which was also strictly true. For I really do not believe that I had at that moment the strength in me to cross the Cathedral Close.

He was very pleasant and sympathetic. Tea was produced, and at last I found myself taking the fatal plunge.

"There is something," I said, "which I ought to tell you, and which, in fact, I must tell you before we are married."

"What is it?" he asked in a tone of curiosity, but without the least trace of uneasiness.

"If we are to be married," I said, "you must, I fear, give up your Minor Canonry here, and we must live abroad for a while at any rate. I have considerable influence, and if you want parish work, or clerical work of any kind, I believe I could secure an English living at some watering-place, or,

better still in thè heart of the country. On that point I can satisfy you ; but we must not be married here, and we must not live here after our marriage."

"I confess I do not understand you," he said with a marked trace of irritation in his tone. "You are the last woman in the world whom I should have accused of whims ; and yet this seems to me very like one, and I must say a most unreasonable whim into the bargain."

"It is no whim at all," I answered. "It is thè most sober, matter-of-fact common-sense. I cannot marry you here, because my real name is not Allen. I have been hiding here in honest search of peace and quiet under a name that is not my own."

"That is unpleasant," he said, "and

certainly strange. It will require explanation, but I do not see anything impossible in it."

"You will see soon," I answered. "I changed my name for the very best of reasons. I could not have lived here without doing so. I have here, in this portfolio, all the reports of my own Case, the Case in which I was concerned, and of which I have no doubt you read at the time. It is not so many months ago, and it was very fully reported." And I offered him a little locked memorandum-book with the reports of the trial, and with the comments of the Press upon my conduct, all most carefully "laid in," as book collectors say, which means neatly cut out, and artistically pasted down as if they were choice etchings.

“You had better look at it,” I continued, “at once.”

He took the hateful volume, and opened it hesitatingly. His eye caught the title of the Case in a moment, and I saw his face flush and then turn very pale.

“But what has this to do with you?” he asked, evidently still hoping against hope.

“Simply this,” I answered, “that I am the Miriam Craven there spoken of, and that my father and Sir Henry Craven are both still alive. Mr. Sabine would have married me if he had lived, and every word he swore to is entirely true. I was as innocent as a child; but I could not fight the evidence against me. A good deal of it was true, but did not come to much; part of it was perjured, but of that it is now idle to

talk. I was an innocent woman; before God I swear it."

He rose to his feet and laid down the horrible volume on the table as if the very touch of it polluted him. Then, in a choked voice, he began to speak.

"I shall hold your confidence absolutely sacred," he said, "and shall not hesitate to tell everybody, if you will permit me to do so, that you have released me from my engagement. They may say what they like of me, it matters nothing. It is for you, and for you alone, that I am concerned. 'Whoso marrieth her that is divorced, committeth adultery.' Believing that as fully and as firmly as I believe in your own innocence, it makes it impossible for me to keep to my engagement. I cannot and will not break what I believe to

be in very truth, the Divine law. But I cannot keep myself from saying that I feel as if you were my own sister, and that you will find a brother in me whenever you need one. Even if you do not believe me now, you will, I think, come to believe me as the years pass by."

I had risen to my feet and I held out my hand to him. He took it, bent over it, and kissed it.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," I answered, and the door closed behind him.

I heard him descend the stairs, and I could see from the window that instead of turning towards the Cathedral, he strode away in the direction of the main road leading into the open country, and that he avoided the footpath.

I loved the man for the first time; but

I think my time for tears had passed. I made my way to my bed-room, threw myself down on my bed, and buried my head in the pillows.

CHAPTER X.

MR. MEADOWSWEET kept his word faithfully ; and I need not say that I, for my part, kept silence as to what had taken place between us, and met all attempts to draw me out on the subject with what, for those who had sufficient intelligence, was a strong hint that my own matters were my own business and not theirs.

Evidently there could have been no serious quarrel ; for Mr. Meadowsweet and I remained on friendly, although not on intimate terms, never passing each other in the street without exchanging a shorter

or longer greeting, and sometimes even joining company. Thus, then, there could have been no violent rupture. We must have decided either to postpone the marriage indefinitely, or else for some unknown reason to abandon all idea of it. Certainly every probability pointed to the latter hypothesis..

Could my health be the cause? Nobody who knew anything of my habits of life could for a moment suppose as much. The idea was ridiculous. I was as robust for my sex as Mr. Meadowsweet himself. Could my private income be dependent on some condition prohibiting a second marriage? That, too, did not seem likely. If so, there need have been no secret about the matter. Besides, Mr. Meadowsweet's own income would have been almost sufficient for us, although, no doubt, we

could have managed more comfortably with a little more.

Ultimately the matter dropped, and I gathered from my little maid, who was told it by her mother, who was told it by her husband the verger, that Mrs. Dean had said emphatically that she did not like people who were mysterious, and that Mr. Dean had expressed more or less concurrence in the sentiment as being a sound one.

One day, however, when I had thought that the matter was over, I received a letter through my solicitors, which I felt certain at the time meant trouble, although I did not guess then in what shape and manner the trouble would come.

My father had written to me under cover to Messrs. Wylie and Wylie, who had very wisely refused to give him my address.

It was the old story of course. He very much wished to see me, and he badly wanted a little money. Could we not meet again, and could I not listen to his troubles?

Then came a long string of excuses, false on the face of them, for his impecunious condition. His expenses were enormous, his account was overdrawn, and would not be set right until the next Michaelmas Cathedral audit, if even then. All he wanted was a little money, not to pay into his bankers, but to lock up in his bureau, and to carry on the war with. A couple of hundred pounds would be more than enough, and at a pinch he could make a hundred and fifty do. In any event he trusted that I would let him have fifty, as it was utterly impossible for a man in his position to go about

without half-a-crown in his pocket, or not to have a sovereign ready if it were wanted for any small purpose. He would write me any promise or undertaking to pay that my lawyers might suggest, and they might then act upon it, if they thought fit, should the utterly impossible contingency of his not making punctual payment occur.

This, he added, he meant in earnest, but could hardly help regarding it as a joke, seeing that his word had always been as good as his bond. (This last remark was unconsciously true.) Sir Henry, he continued, had, to his great surprise, most positively declined to assist him further. Finally, he begged an immediate answer, assuring me that time was of vital importance.

I could hardly help laughing as I read

between the lines of this pitiful begging letter from a man who, to put the matter most plainly, ought to have saved money and to be saving it, instead of to be thus abjectly out at elbows and down at heel.

Then I became indignant when I recollected what my relations with my father had always been, and what part he had played in the history of my unhappy life.

I could scarcely at first trust myself to write to him, but I did so at last after a lapse of a few days. I put no address and sent the letter to London by the guard of the train with instructions to post it there, registering it, and bring me back the receipt.

“I am very much surprised,” I wrote, “that you should come to me for money,

although not at all surprised and quite ready to believe that you are in what you consider a necessity sufficient to justify the application.

“I have a small income, out of which, as a matter-of-fact, I am able to save, and do what I can in the way of charity. Yours does not seem to me to be a case that at all calls for charity, and, personally, I consider that you have not the slightest claim upon me.

“If you wish to save yourself vexation you had better take this as my final decision, and if you want money you must set to work and borrow it as other men do, and on the best terms that you can.

“You might find your past experiences at Ossulston useful, and perhaps Mr. Thacker, now that you are transferred to a wider field of usefulness, might be disposed to meet

any little request on your part in a correspondingly wide spirit. You have certainly quite as much claim upon him as upon myself, and I know no reason why, with a little diplomacy, you could not get him to see how moderate your request really is."

I sealed the letter boldly with a Craven signet-ring, which I happened to have among my effects, and, as subsequent events will sufficiently show, it reached its destination, and also produced exactly its intended effect.

For my own part, I dismissed the matter from my mind.

I was now, to use a homely phrase that exactly expresses my meaning, getting on famously in Salchester society. The women were still my friends, and the men my

devoted servants. It was agreed universally that I was a nice, quiet, amiable body, entirely devoid of malice or mischief, and that whatever my past troubles might have been, it would be unkind, and, in fact, indelicate to inquire into them. They were, so everybody concurred, entirely my own affair, and I bore my cross with a meekness and resignation that was highly creditable to me.

As to Mr. Meadowsweet, opinion was divided. Some people were only too ready to denounce him as a fortune-hunter, who, having been disappointed in his ideas as to my position, had not scrupled to jilt me very shabbily. One old lady, indeed, had it from her brother, who was a lawyer in London, and had got his information in the strictest confidence from a clerk in the office of the solicitors of the late Mr.

Allen, that, according to Mr. Allen's will, all my money if I married again was to go away from me at once to his own relations, who, in consequence, watched me as closely as a conclave of cats watching a mouse-hole.

This was an admirable explanation. It suited all the facts. It had an element of romance in it, and it was discreditable to poor Mr. Meadowsweet.

This latter fact, when I came to consider it, annoyed me so thoroughly that I had half a mind to take the old Dean himself into my confidence. He was prejudiced, no doubt. He might even tell me that he could no longer receive me at the Deanery, and suggest the advisability, entirely on my own behalf and for my own good, of my changing my quarters.

This would be unpleasant; but it was a

risk I was quite prepared to take for Mr. Meadowsweet's sake. His behaviour had been that of a gallant gentleman, and it was my evident duty to see that he did not suffer.

I had all but decided on taking this step, and I had, in fact, convinced myself that common justice demanded I should do so, when a circumstance occurred which saved me the trouble.

CHAPTER XI.

I WAS walking down the High Street one day looking in at the shop windows rather than about me, when, for some reason or other, I threw my eyes across the road, and saw approaching me on the other side of the way the Very Reverend the Dean of Salchester, accompanied by no less or other an ecclesiastic than the Very Reverend the Dean of Southwick, and my eyes met those of the two.

I made a bow which was most unmistakably directed to the Dean of Salchester alone, and intended to exclude his companion,

and then quickening my pace walked into the very first shop which gave me a chance of retreat, and which, providentially, was a milliner's and ladies' drapers.

Here I made several small purchases, loitering over them until I could see that the coast was perfectly clear, and then I sallied out, and, as quickly as I could, hurried home.

What was I to do? I did not want to leave Salchester if I could possibly help it. The Meadowsweet trouble, if I may so term it, was most probably doomed to a natural death as soon as it was seen that Mr. Meadowsweet and myself continued friends in earnest and not in seeming merely. But my father would be certain, out of mere malice, to tell the story from his own point of view, and with his own embellishments, to the Dean and to everybody else.

He would refer them to the cruelly misleading reports in the papers, of which I felt certain that his vanity had prompted him to make an album, if only for the value of the sentence in which the reporters described the manifest emotion and positive anguish with which he had given his evidence. And, when I came to recollect it, what a malignant tissue of lies that evidence had been, and how craftily framed to discredit me to the utmost possible extent!

This much I might take for granted. Then came the question what would follow, and here I was fairly puzzled.

For the world, as an old proverb runs, is divided into men, women, and priests, and if the two first are apt at times to puzzle you, you can certainly say of ecclesiastics as a class, that it is utterly impossible ever to tell how they will act

under any given set of circumstances, or even whether they will act at all.

So I went back to my lodgings in a most unpleasant state of uncertainty. I was not going to allow myself to be distressed at the matter, let it turn out how it might ; but it would be a distinct affectation to pretend for a moment that I was not very bitterly annoyed.

Early next morning, while I was still wondering what might happen, I was, I cannot but confess, astonished to be told that the Dean himself—not the Dean of Southwick, but the Dean of Salchester itself—would be glad to see me if I were disengaged. I, of course, replied that I should be delighted to see him, and in he came.

I have hitherto omitted to describe Dr. Propert, and I may perhaps conveniently

do so at this point. Unlike my father, he had taken a high University degree, and had had for some years acted as a Fellow and Tutor of his College. In this capacity he had preached several University sermons, which, without being markedly heterodox, or militantly orthodox, had yet given rise to considerable discussion of a character entirely favourable to their author.

After this he had been invited to preach what I believe are termed show sermons to fashionable and critical London congregations, who, like the Athenians in the days of Paul, are always seeking after something new. This had led to his gracious notice by a certain most exalted personage, through whose personal influence he had been elevated to the Deanery of Salchester, with the entire concurrence not

only of the fashionable world, but of Printing House Square, the inspired voice of which pronounced him to be, in these days of doubt and difficulty, perhaps the very best man who could have been selected for the precise piece of preferment in question, and had gone on to draw a most learned and interesting parallel between him, and Cyril of Alexandria, and Tillotson, and Keble, and a dozen or so of other eminent ecclesiastics.

Personally, fortune had favoured Dr. Propert. He was a man of fine presence, if not altogether of handsome features, and would have made a capital field officer of Foot Guards. He was now, to all appearances, just about the wrong side of fifty, but by very little, and now that I am recalling these details, I may as well add that he had a faultless seat in the saddle,

and in many other respects contrasted more than favourably with the county squires of the neighbourhood.

After a little exchange of sentences about nothing in particular, the Dean told me, as I had expected, that he came to speak to me as a matter of duty, upon a very painful and difficult subject.

I had guessed as much, and I told him so.

“That is why,” he continued, “I have taken the perhaps unusual course of calling alone, because I wish, if you desire it, that what passes between us should be known to no one but ourselves, unless you think fit to make it public on your own account.”

“I shall certainly respect your confidence,” I answered, “whatever it may be that you have to say.”

“You are very kind,” he replied, “and I think you will be acting prudently. Of course you saw me yesterday with your father, who was somewhat surprised at seeing you here, and from whom I gathered with astonishment, and I must also admit not without a considerable amount of pain, that you had been stopping amongst us under a name, which you, possibly acting under mistaken advice, have been led to assume with the view of concealing your past history.

“Under such circumstances I could have had but only one opinion if you had in any way misled us by any positive and direct untruth. But it would be most unfair to suggest for a moment that you have attempted to do so. I have heard, more than once, that you have always spoken of your past life as having been

sad and sorrowful, and have begged to be excused from making any reference to it. This shows an honourable intention on your part, but if there has been no *suggestio falsi*, there has certainly been a *suppressio veri*, which very nearly approaches to it.

“You have, for instance (not that I put the point as influencing my own judgment, but as one which might very well present itself most unfavourably to the judgment of others), allowed yourself to publicly partake of the most sacred ordinances of the Church. That you should have done so is entirely matter for your own conscience. I do not presume to question your conduct, or to impute to you for a moment any unworthy motive. But other ministers of the Church might very well take a different view, and probably would.

“I am sure you will acquit me,” he went on, “of any desire to judge harshly of your conduct, or to in any way dictate to you. But I cannot help thinking, you will upon reflection agree with myself, that it is advisable that you should leave Salchester. Personally, I shall be sorry to lose you, and I may say the same most unreservedly for my wife. But you will, I cannot but feel, see that by stopping here you will place many members of the Chapter, together with their families, in a position of the greatest difficulty and embarrassment; and this, as a mere matter of good feeling, if not indeed of positive duty, you ought to do your best at any personal sacrifice to avoid.”

It is refreshing to meet a gentleman, even though he may be bigoted. And I doubt, after all, whether clergymen are

by any means so bigoted as it is the custom to represent them. And once again I could not help thinking of my father, and reflecting how meanly and shabbily he had behaved, not only all through this pitiful history, but in this last miserable incident in its course.

Had there been a spark of manhood in his soul he would have bitten off his tongue sooner than have used it of deliberate malice to drive me out of my little harbour of refuge.

“You are very kind,” I said, looking him frankly in the face, “and I am very grateful to you for the interest you have evinced in me. I think, upon the whole, you are right, and I promise you, although of course I am in no way bound to do so, that I will leave Salchester as soon as I can possibly make the necessary arrangements.

I shall be very sorry to go, and still more sorry to lose several among you whom I have already learned to consider as my friends; but I almost agree with you that, whether up to now I have been acting rightly or wrongly, there is now, at any rate, but one course open to me."

"Believe me, it is so," he answered.

"Obviously I shall keep my own counsel," I continued, "as to the causes of my departure; and in return for this promise, I have one favour to ask of you, and that is to let me now, and here, shortly tell you the true story of my marriage, and of my divorce, and to form your own opinion on it as to my father's share in the events it contains."

"You have a clear right to ask that of me," he answered, but with an air of evident relief at seeing the business end as



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"You have a clear right to ask that of me," he answered, but with an air of evident relief at seeing the business end as

he had wished. "It is my duty, under the circumstances, to hear and to thoroughly consider and test any thing you may have to say."

Would any woman have done otherwise than I did? I told him the whole story from beginning to end, leaving out nothing that told against me, and carefully doing justice, as I always have done and always shall do in my own mind, to the highly honourable and dignified manner in which my husband had acted throughout.

I spoke of him without a word of bitterness. I spoke of him in fact as I had always found him—honourable, and, but for his foibles, a man to be admired. Of George Sabine I told the truth. Of my father I also told the truth, without concealing any portion of it, and carefully avoiding anything that might be construed into vin-

dictiveness. And I then added, what of course he knew, that I had come to Salchester solely to hide myself and to rest.

“And now, Mr. Dean,” I concluded, rising and offering my hand, “I must seek rest and a hiding-place elsewhere. I shall go as soon as possible, and I can only hope that I shall be as soon as possible forgotten.”

The Dean was cordial in his manner, but evidently relieved at the turn affairs had taken.

“You will certainly not be forgotten at the Deanery, Lady Craven,” he said. “I have no secrets from my wife, but she and I will always think well and kindly of you. I can answer for her as certainly as for myself. Should chance bring us anywhere together again, pray remember that we consider you our friend, and hold you in

the list of our friends. I am sure you are right in going, and were I you, I should not needlessly defer my departure. Let me again assure you of my full belief in all you have told me, and of my sorrow and sympathy."

He shook hands very cordially and took his leave, and some two hours afterwards his gardener brought round a lovely bouquet of flowers, attached to which was Mrs. Propert's card, and the intimation in her autograph that they came with her kindest regards.

I saw the messenger myself, and with a heavy heart sent back a message of thanks. By noon next day I had completed all my arrangements, paid all my bills, disposed of my pony and carriage, and taken an affectionate farewell of my little maid, whose sorrow at having to leave me was only

equalled by her astonishment at the unexpected present of a Post Office savings bank deposit book, assuring her of the fact that five pounds stood to her credit. I took her round to the Post Office myself, and went through the necessary formalities.

The poor child was fairly amazed, but I am sure that the present had nothing whatever to do with her manifestations of regret at my departure, which were very sincere and, in spite of herself, demonstrative. She was a nice bright girl, and I hope she has married or will marry a good husband.

I had written to Mr. Meadowsweet a request which he could hardly refuse, that he should be at the station to see me off. He was there as boldly and as regardlessly of possible Salchester opinion as need be. And he also was armed with some hot-house flowers

which I knew must have come down from London, and with a copy of the *Christian Year*.

He saw me into my carriage, remained talking to me at the door, did not finally shake hands until the train had begun to move, and then stood watching it from the platform until it turned a curve before reaching the bridge over the river, and so hid him from the sight.

I put the flowers by and opened the book.

Right across the title-page he had written in his own bold, clear hand, "Lady Craven, from Sebastian Meadowsweet, with every hearty good wish."

He at any rate was not ashamed that, so far as I was concerned, all the world should know we had been the closest of friends and possibly even more.

I do not mind confessing that I kissed the volume and put it tenderly by in my travelling-bag before turning to a yellow-covered ecclesiastical novel of Trollope's, which I had purchased at the bookstall as being more or less appropriate to the occasion.

So the train—it was the express—tore on through the pleasant country until we began to reach canals, and then brick-fields, and then suburbs, and at last drew up in that busy focus of life, the Great Western Terminus at Paddington.

A brougham, for which I had written, was waiting for me, and I very quickly found myself again within the hospitable portals of Rawlings', tired with my journey, ready for supper, and a little annoyed that it was too late that night to go to the play.

I badly missed my little maid, but there was my supper at any rate, and there are worse things after a long journey than a good English mutton cutlet and a glass of champagne. My sleep that night was sound, and it was past ten o'clock the next morning before I rang for my chocolate.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER a couple of days again devoted to maps and guide-books, with their corresponding pros and cons, I decided upon Easthampton as my future abode.

I was very much in the position of a chess-player who apparently has all the board open to him, while in reality every square is hopelessly blocked. There are plenty of foreign watering-places, but in every one of them there was the certainty, rather than the risk, that my husband would be perfectly well known by reputation at any rate, and that I myself should be recognised.

England was my better chance, though even in England there were difficulties. At one time I almost thought of the Channel Islands, where, so long as you pay your bills once a week with regularity, nobody cares who you are, what you are, or what may be your destination, either in this world or the next. But the Channel Islands, except for a very few weeks in each year, are practically as remote from civilisation as the South Sea Archipelago itself, and certainly far less enjoyable.

So I gave the preference to England, and, as I have said, pitched upon Easthampton, of which I could say, with even more truth than the Tichborne Claimant said of Wapping, that I had never been there in my life, but had heard that it was a very respectable place.

Easthampton is on the South Coast,

somewhere between the Solent on the east, and Plymouth on the west. It was originally a fishing village, and that, too, not so many years ago. A London physician liked the air and built himself a Swiss chalet there. Little by little he began to buy up the land "as an ox licketh up the grass of the field." Then he built one or two pleasant villas, which he let, on distinctly advantageous terms, to brother medical men. It was then discovered for the first time that the air of Easthampton would arrest consumption in its earlier stages, and was an absolute specific for all infantile diseases.

Fashionable valetudinarians flocked to it. The railway opened a branch line. Old Æsculapius was wise in his generation: he intended to be a baronet and to found a family. There were three hotels

in the place; but he would only allow one public-house, and sternly refused so much as a rood of land for a dissenting conventicle of any denomination whatever.

The old land jobber's wealth grew like that of Jacob Astor himself. The foreshore, which he had purchased by the acre, he let out on building leases by the square foot. As there were no poor in the place, no poor-rate, and nothing even remotely approximating to a slum, the average mortality was astonishingly low. And at last a pier was built, not for the vulgar purposes of commerce, but to afford a promenade and a landing-place for yachts.

For me Easthampton had this great advantage—that I should not be likely to be identified unless I went into society in my own name, which I had no intention of doing, and also that, although the place

was expensive, it was yet quite within my means.

Accordingly I took Sea View Bungalow—so-called, I suppose, because it had no verandah, a second floor, and a set of garrets over that—and I furnished it modestly and unpretentiously, but very prettily, although I say it, for I gave my taste full scope. I also, of course, started, not a pony-basket, but a respectable victoria, with a strong, sedate cob. I took three seats in the parish church, and subscribed liberally to all the charities; but carefully avoided the acquaintance of the ministers of the altar, who, with their wives and daughters, knew their “Crockford” as well as the members of the Irish peerage knew their “Debrett.”

My exercise beyond the Bungalow garden was a daily drive. If I wanted a walk I drove a mile out up into the country,

dismissed my carriage with instructions to the coachman to meet me again, and took my walk by myself among the lanes.

It was a dull life and yet a very pleasant one. I had my flowers. I took to breeding canaries, and I had a regular supply of books from London through the railway bookstall. I thus had enough to do; and if I am told that my days must have hung heavily on my hands, I can only answer that I was busy and happy as compared with what I had been either at Ossulston, or in St. James's Square, or even at Salchester.

I dwell upon all this, because I might otherwise seem to be hurrying my story. But for the present, at any rate, I am in an uneventful part of it. Had I kept a diary it would have been a blank for day after day, little better or more significant

than the wooden cross of Robinson Crusoe, with its six consecutive short notches regularly followed by a deep one.

At last, however, the time came. The barracks were finished, and the cavalry, a regiment of Dragoons, and the infantry, a battalion from a double battalion Line regiment, came down to their new quarters, filling the whole place with animation and bustle.

As soon as they had settled down comfortably, it began to be known that the Queen's Musketeers intended giving a ball, and inviting all the residents who were what might be officially described as upon the local Court Directory. I need not say that Mrs. Gascoigne—that is to say, myself—was among the number of those who received a card of invitation.

I hesitated for some time. Then I decided to accept but not to go, and to plead a sick headache as an excuse, if I should ever hereafter be asked my reason for staying away. When the evening came, either I must have thought better of the sick headache, or else must have forgotten it, for I most certainly dressed myself very carefully, and went.

I want to describe my dress. It was a high-cut black velvet of that kind which announces its excellence by the way in which its folds hang. It was trimmed with point-lace, and my jewels were my favourite pearls. Beyond these I wore no jewellery whatever, except a large fire opal. The stone is not one which ladies as a rule affect; but, for myself, I have always had a sort of superstitious fancy for it.

I knew as I entered the room that there was not a woman in it better dressed than myself, or, to speak quite candidly, with anything like my taste. And men have an instinct over taste in a woman's dress exactly as women have an instinct over wine, although wholly ignorant of vintages, and even of brands.

I danced most of the square dances, declined the round dances, was taken down to supper by the Major himself, and yielded to his entreaties that after supper I would join the cotillon. I was then driven rapidly home and went to bed with the proud consciousness that I had scored a distinct triumph among the men, while giving the women as little occasion for jealousy as possible.

After all, I thought to myself, why should

I not captivate and marry some young officer? I must tell him everything, of course, as I did poor Mr. Meadowsweet. But he will have no religious scruples in the matter, and we may very well live very happily together. Besides, I can find the money for his exchange if he should ever wish to do so, or, if he liked, we should have quite enough to enable him to retire comfortably, and to busy himself, if time hangs heavily on his hands, in the yeomanry or the militia, although it would be best, of course, to persuade him to cut the thing altogether, and settle down quietly somewhere.

This, however, as I felt, was discounting the future somewhat too liberally; and yet I was not altogether without reasonable ground for my speculations, inasmuch as a certain Captain Maltby had during the

evening paid me a degree of attention which, although not effusive, had yet been more than was strictly necessary.

I was full of these thoughts, or rather vague plans, as I brushed out my hair for the night, and discovered to my horror, not that it was turning grey, but that its extreme ties sadly needed singeing. Then I drew the curtains, for the sun was shining pleasantly, and was soon enough fast asleep. I believe really that dancing, if you thoroughly enjoy it, tires you more completely than even riding or skating.

Captain Maltby had asked me if he might call, and I had said he might, provided it was not that day, for he had preferred his request during the cotillon and long after midnight; so I lay in bed with an easy mind

until I felt thoroughly refreshed, and then proceeded to improve my personal appearance after the most approved principles.

First, I went down to the beach and had a delicious plunge in the rising tide. Then I had a substantial French breakfast or English lunch. Then I had round the victoria, and went for a pleasant sunny drive among the breezy uplands, rich with the strong aromatic odour of Norwegian pines. Then I spent the rest of the day quietly at home over a novel, and, when the moon rose, felt so fresh and invigorated that I believe if I had had a maid as escort I should have been tempted into a ramble on the cliffs.

I purposely sat up late, not meaning to rise too early, and dressed myself the next morning with more than usual care. My gown was a pretty French Surah. It was

of a delicate shade, adding to my apparent height, and fitted me perfectly. I wore nothing in the way of jewellery but a plain brooch and solitaires. A broad belt round my waist completed the toilette, and my hair was dressed as plainly as might be. Then I filled the room with flowers, and sat in my easy-chair with a volume of Tennyson.

The officers of Her Majesty's service regard Tennyson much as clergymen regard Milton. They are aware he ought to be read; they are all ready at any moment to declare most solemnly that they read him daily, but they have a certain wholesome terror of people who actually do read him. For themselves, they would be about as likely to read Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy" or Longfellow's "Evangeline."

But I am not among those who are indignant at these conventional and harmless little frauds. It would be a terrible world if we all told the exact truth, almost as bad a world as if all of us in it were to lie consistently through thick and thin, like the Very Reverend the Dean of Southwick.

When Captain Maltby arrived bringing with him a Mr. Dalton, a brother officer, to act as a sort of *aide-de-camp*, I was quite ready to receive them. They stopped for the conventional half-hour, and partook of the conventional glass of sherry.

I need not dwell upon our conversation. I set the ball rolling myself, kept it rolling, and took very special care that it should roll everywhere in general, and nowhere in particular. When they left, Captain Maltby half asked permission to call again,

and half expressed his intention of doing so. Not bad diplomacy for a young officer in the Heavies !

I, who had studied diplomacy in its most *Haute Ecole*, and sat at the feet of its most accomplished master, replied, in my pleasantest manner, that Easthampton was a small place, and that I should be very pleased if we met again.

That we should meet again, and before long, I intended to take very particular care.

And now that I have brought matters to this stage, I must condense my narrative a little. Of course I met Captain Maltby several times. Occasionally he would pass me with his regiment. He was always well mounted, and it did me good to look at him. It is mere affectation for any

woman to pretend that she does not take pleasure in the sight of a handsome man. And Captain Maltby, who had a good seat, and rode a splendid charger, was as smart an officer as ever led a troop.

Sometimes we would meet upon the parade, or on the pier, when it would have looked like mere coquetry to avoid his company. I need not say how wide is the difference between a Cathedral city and a garrison town. Even when the two are combined, as is often the case, there is a distinctly religious line of caste which separates the Brahmins or priests, with their wives and families, from the shatryas or warriors.

At Salchester I, as a young widow, would have hopelessly ruined my reputation by walking with an officer, even if accompanied

by the most irreproachable of bodkins—say the quartermaster himself or the discreetest of duennas. Here at Easthampton I could do as I liked. And I did.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE a month had passed, Captain Maltby was a regular visitor. An officer of his age and in a crack regiment is a better man of the world than any ecclesiastic or diplomatist. He was making love to me as if he knew that I knew it. He had also the sense to be aware that he could not continue this pastime indefinitely; and, without pretending to exactly read his thoughts at any given date, I am sure he very soon came to the conclusion that he would either have to marry me or else to give me up altogether.

One morning he called armed with a

book which I had expressed a wish to read, and which was not within the resources of either Mudie or Smith. I forget now what it was, but can just remember that it was a volume of travel in Central Africa, somewhat out of date, and of scientific rather than of general interest.

I thanked him for the trouble he had taken in a manner which invited him to stop; and he took the hint, while he also declined my permission to smoke a cigarette if he cared to do so.

"The fact is, Mrs. Gascoigne," he said, "I came to talk for a few minutes, if you do not mind, and not to smoke or to indulge in your marvellous sherry. I want to ask you to keep a secret of mine, if you will."

"Secrets are dangerous things," I answered seriously, and seeing that he was in earnest.

"No one knows that fact better than myself. If you choose to tell me your secret it shall be as safe with me as with your man of business; but I shall decline to give you my advice over it."

"It is not exactly your advice I wanted," he replied, "although I will own that I am in a difficulty and want you to help me out of it. In one sense I am a little hampered by the fact that, what you call your own secret, I happen to know already. But it's for that very reason that I am anxious to tell you mine. The one thing which stands in my way and makes me feel awkward is that I know from what I have heard that you are very well off. Now for myself I am a cadet of a poor house with just enough beyond my pay to enable me to get on, while even that is not certain—my father might stop my allowance at any moment."

I had felt certain from the first that he was a gentleman and utterly incapable of anything mean or dishonourable ; and yet I began to wonder uneasily whether he might not have been losing at play or have found his way into the money-lender's hands, and be under the idea that I could possibly help him. So I answered cautiously :

“Perhaps I am not so well off as you suppose. A woman by herself can live very economically, in fact for next to nothing, and (I said this with a laugh) I have no expensive tastes. But do not let anything that you may fancy you know about me hinder what you have to say. I am curious to hear it, and pleased to be taken into your confidence.”

His face was so tanned with the sun that I could only guess how the blood flushed to his cheeks by seeing the skin

round the roots of his hair turn a vivid crimson.

“We are at cross purposes, I fancy,” he said, “and if we talk much longer I shall get bewildered and perhaps make a fool of myself. What I want to ask you, Mrs. Gascoigne, is for something which I want very much more than money. A reasonable cheque of mine, I am glad to say, is good at any time in Craig’s Court; and unless I want to run into figures which I have not yet touched, Cox’s would see me through. I want you to do something else for me—something quite different. In fact, what I want is to ask you if you will marry me, and so make me the happiest and proudest man, not in the Queen’s Musketeers, but in the whole service.”

It was my time now to turn red; and

I think, if I can judge by the flush which I felt rushing to my face, that my own performance in this respect fairly eclipsed his and was fully as sincere and genuine.

“You cannot possibly know all about me,” I said, “or else you would never have asked me what you have.”

“But you’re wrong,” he answered. “I do know, and so for the matter of that does our chief, and so do all of us. And we are all of one opinion about the matter; and the chief, who gets very violent when he is angry, swears that old Sir Henry ought to be made to run the gauntlet. And I’ll tell you another thing, Lady Craven. The chief’s wife sides with the chief; she is Madame la Colonelle, and no mistake! She is a power, let me tell you; and the subalterns are far more afraid of her than of the Colonel himself.

Her own expression is that the whole thing was a burning shame; and we all agree with her, only that we use shorter language. Now look here, if you think I am exaggerating in the least, I'll back if I tell her what's happened she'll come and call on you to-morrow afternoon, and then you see there can't possibly be any mistakes, can there?"

For the life of me I could not help laughing. I wonder why it is that all men who are worth their salt are, when you once move them, as simple and as blunt as schoolboys.

I began to think, in a strange whirl of ideas, of the great Duke of Wellington and of his memorable utterance about Napoleon's bones, which, by some whimsical association of ideas, were suggested to me by the skeleton in my own cupboard,

and I fairly burst out again into a hearty peal of merriment in which my guest and suitor joined.

“Well,” I answered, “let us wait and see if she calls, and — let me see — you may come again this day week if you like, only you must distinctly understand that I do not promise to be in, and cannot indeed promise that I shall be in the town at all. I am, as you seem to know, my own mistress; and for that very reason my movements are uncertain, or, as unkind people would say, capricious.”

He rose to his feet as I rose to mine. I held out my hand, but he did not take it. “I think,” he said, “it would be only kind of you to say something or other to me to-day; to give me some sort of an idea. You can’t tell — I am sure you can’t tell — how much I love

you, and how deeply my heart is set on this. I'll sell out if you like, or exchange for India, or do anything. In fact I ought to have told you before this that I would sell out at once if you didn't like the regiment, only I really didn't think of it. I somehow let it go without saying. It was very stupid of me."

"It was not at all stupid," I answered, "and I quite believe all you have told me; and now, you know, I really think that I must be going for my afternoon drive."

"But you will surely give me some sort of answer before I go. I think I have a right to ask that at least."

"But I can't give you an answer," I replied; "at least not the answer which I suppose you want me to give. I like you very much, but I am also determined that

you shall not leave the regiment on my account. If I am to marry you at all it must not involve your leaving the regiment. On that point my mind is made up ; and as we quite understand one another it is no good discussing the matter further."

"But I don't want to discuss the matter," he urged. "It doesn't need discussing. I only want you to say yes. Surely you can say that at once as well as the day after to-morrow."

"I can't say it at all until this day week, and then, if I intend to say it, I shall be here to do so. All I can say at present is, that I hope with all my heart I shall be here."

After this there was clearly nothing left for him, but to go ; so he took my hand.

“I have all the faith in the world in you,” he said, “and I am quite sure of Mrs. Martyn, and I shall leave you with an easy heart, although the hours will be horribly long.”

Now Mrs. Martyn was the Colonel's wife, of whom we had already been speaking under her more formal designation, and I had made up my mind very fully that, if she did in fact call upon me, and, after hearing what I had to tell her, on assuring me that she knew it already, left me upon cordial terms, I would marry Captain Maltby as soon as he pleased; and if she did not, I was equally determined that Maltby should not have, as I knew must inevitably be the case, to leave the regiment on my account. So that once again matters simplified themselves for me in what my father would have termed a

distinctly providential manner, and indeed I began to feel that at last in my life the chances of the game were setting in my favour.

So long as I could marry Captain Maltby without driving him from the regiment, I wanted, and in fact most sincerely wished, to do so; but I was equally determined that no power on earth should induce me to in any way cross or even alter the course of his life. I had had one unhappy marriage, and I was determined that under no circumstances would I allow myself to be led into a second.

For however much a man may love his wife, he cannot possibly love her as either he or she would wish if she has in any way crossed his career instead

of having aided it and accelerated its success.

Marriage is a partnership in many more senses than one; and I was most distinctly and resolutely determined that about my second partnership there should be no mistake whatever at the outset. Everything must be entirely understood and arranged, or else I would remain Lady Craven, however much I might desire to be rid of the hateful name.

So, without another word as to the future, I again wished Captain Maltby good-bye, and paid him the compliment of watching him down the stairs. Then I sat down for a while and thought matters over, or, to be more precise, reviewed them, for they now lay entirely beyond my own control, and upon the knees of the Fates.

The result of the review was upon the whole reassuring. Captain Maltby was no boy. He was an officer of some standing, close upon his majority, and a man of the world. It was out of the question to suppose that he had been intentionally misleading me, and it was almost equally out of the question to suppose that he was under any delusion on his own account.

The marvellous thing to my mind was how they could have found out about me; but I think that even here I hit upon the right solution.

In referring to the Clergy List I found that the rectory of the parish in which the barracks were situated, and in the parish church of which the troops attended service, was one of considerable value, and oddly enough, or rather not at all oddly,

if my conjecture was right, was in the gift of the Dean and Chapter of Salchester, who, on the occasion of the last vacancy which had happened just before my arrival in Easthampton, had appointed to it one of their Minor Canons, a worthy middle-aged gentleman with a fussy, mischief-making wife.

I felt that I might be doing this good lady a very great injustice ; but I at once jumped to the conclusion that she had heard all about my history from her husband, and had repeated it, with comments and additions of her own, to the wives of every married officer in the two regiments, including of course Mrs. Martyn herself.

But the matter was too trifling for me to trouble myself with it. I know my father to be sufficiently spiteful and

vindictive to do me any injury that lay in his power, even in the most roundabout way; and towards the mischief-making gossip herself, my feeling was one of contempt, rather than of irritation, and certainly had in it not a trace of anything so serious as a desire for revenge.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEXT day Mrs. Martyn called at an orthodox hour, and in orthodox state. She was very chatty, and with a strong masculine element in her which is almost invariably to be found in the wives of officers who accompany their husbands on service, and is, to my thinking, extremely pleasant.

Except that she was educated and of a good county family, she somewhat reminded one of Thackeray's Mrs. O'Dowd, with all her frankness, *bonhomie*, and entire imperturbability.

Before she had been in the room three or four minutes, I was entirely at my ease. I can only give the general impression which what she had to say left upon my mind. As she chatted away, doing nearly all the talk herself, she gave me to understand that the ladies of the garrison, and more especially of the regiment, had taken to me as kindly as had the men, and that I was generally a *persona grata*.

“You see, Lady Craven—or must I say Mrs. Gascoigne—when the men are on parade, or on field duty, or at mess, we have nothing to do amongst ourselves but to chatter—the Colonel calls it cackling—so of course we chattered about you. First we began about your jewels, and I needn’t tell you we envied them. Now that the dear old days of loot are over, you don’t

see jewels like yours at a garrison ball. They are superb, fine enough for a Begum. And then you know we began to talk about all kinds of things, and it was settled at last that I should come round here to-day as a sort of deputation, or as what you may call the oldest inhabitant."

I thanked her very cordially.

"You will have us all here before long, and you will find that there are quite enough of us to keep you lively, if not indeed a round dozen too many. And do what you like with them, but don't play poker at afternoon tea; take that hint from a friend. It's a bad habit, and it grows upon you. One of our young fellows actually had to leave because his wife would play poker. She ruined him in about six months after she took to it."

I replied, that I did not know how to play poker, and had no intention of learning.

“Well,” she said, “if you keep clear of cards, you won’t do much harm among us, or come to much either. We are not a mischief-making set like the old women of both sexes in a Cathedral town, and we can enjoy ourselves in our own way. Now there is one of us, she’ll tell you all about it herself, regularly rides her husband’s second charger with the garrison drag, and makes him come with her. I believe she’d ride in our regimental steeplechases if the committee would allow her to enter; and yet, bar her passion for horses, or rather for riding, for she knows no more of horse-flesh than the man in the moon, she’s as quiet a little soul as ever lived, and I’m sure you’ll like her.”

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I told her that I could ride a little along a good turnpike road, or over level turf, but that I was not at all likely to be seen anywhere near the tails of the drag hounds.

“Ah, well! I didn’t know; and yet you ought to ride too. You’d look well on a horse. One or two of our fellows have said so, Maltby more particularly.”

I felt the colour rising to my face, and she could not have helped noticing it.

“He’s a capital fellow, Maltby; one of the best in the regiment; popular with the Colonel and with everybody else. Only, unluckily for him, he hasn’t much money, and not much chance of any that I can see. His father is a judge who married a woman with a lot of money. The money, however, is all tied up, and will go to the elder son, who made a try as a barrister,

but somehow failed. They tell me he has less brains in his whole head than our man has in the tip of his little finger.

“And so Maltby only has what his father allows him. It is not much, but the old man could cut it off at any time, and then, I am sure I don’t know what Maltby would do. I suppose he’d have to exchange and go to India, but that is not so easy as it used to be; besides, he’d lose all his promotion. Nowadays, all the fellows are red hot to go to India and shake the rupee tree. I don’t know what the regiment would do without him, I’m sure. He’s not exactly what you call the life and soul of it, for he’s the quietest fellow going. But he’s one of the best-liked men in it anyhow; and we shouldn’t be ourselves without him.”

I said, in judiciously general terms, that Captain Maltby was a sort of man whom it was impossible to help liking, and that I could perfectly understand his popularity ; and I said something also about a regiment being very much like a public school, a place in which every man was taken for what he was worth, so that popularity was one of the very best testimonials, if not quite the best that a man could have.

“ You are quite right, so it is ; and I can speak of Maltby better than can most people, for he makes a sort of elder sister of me and tells me all his affairs down to the smallest trifle, so that of course he has told me all about yourself, and what are his hopes and fears.”

This was coming to the point with military promptitude indeed, and I confess

I waited anxiously to see what might follow.

“He has told me how he was taken with you, and I said, as happened to be the truth, that I wasn’t in the least surprised. And then he went further and told me all that had passed between you. Not that he needed to tell me, as I had pretty well fathomed it for myself. Now the first thing, my dear Lady Craven, of course is whether you like him. Naturally you haven’t told him so in so many words, but equally of course I imagine you do; because, in the first place, it would be very odd if you didn’t; and in the next place if you didn’t, things could hardly have come to their present pass.”

I did not quite follow this line of argument, but again assured her that I liked

Captain Maltby very much, and from all I had heard and seen respected him as much as I liked him.

“I would have sworn as much,” cried Mrs. Martyn triumphantly. “I told the Colonel so this very morning. Well, then, you see the only question is about his old father, who, from all I hear, is as puritanical as he is rich, and likely to prove excessively disagreeable. However, I am sure for myself that you like one another, and if so, everything will come right in the end. I am sure I certainly hope it will for both your sakes, for you’ll make what the Irish call an ‘illigant couple!’” And with this benediction Mrs. Martyn was about to take her departure when I stopped her.

“There is one little question,” I said, “that I am dying to ask you, Mrs. Martyn.”

“Ask me anything you please, my dear child.”

“Well, then, how did my story get known in the regiment? How did it get about at all?”

“Oh, that’s an easy matter to explain. The parson here came from Salchester, and I suspect—in fact, I happen to know—that the Dean of Salchester gave him what our young fellows term the tip. In other words Dr. Propert repeated what your father had told him. That’s how it’s got about, my dear child.”

“I am not astonished. My father seems to take a sort of pleasure in following me about and trying to hunt me down, and everybody appears to assist him.”

“Not everybody, dear Lady Craven. He won’t get much assistance here; not amongst us at any rate. If he were not your

father, and if he were not a parson, I am sure that some of our young fellows, if they got the chance, would give him as fair a kicking as he deserves. And, as I for myself disapprove of any such school-boy pranks on the part of young men and am officially bound to do so, I should take very particular care in my official capacity, and with my official eyes, to look steadily the other way."

And with this very genuine little outburst of feeling, the good lady tossed her head like one of her husband's chargers, and took her departure.

Another good turn which I indirectly owed to my father. Well, this time at any rate, he had most signally failed. And while I was dressing myself for my afternoon drive, I began to wonder whether he was by this time out of debt at Southwick,

and to hope that he was not, and also that his creditors would insist upon impounding his income, or, at any rate, a very considerable portion of it.

Had they felt as vindictively towards him as I did myself, they would have given him but very scanty grace.

CHAPTER XV.

ON the afternoon of the day appointed I heard, from my seat in the window, Captain Maltby's step in the street, and immediately afterwards his knock at the door.

I had arranged my rooms with more than usual care as to all minor details, and they really looked charmingly English and pleasant, with flowers here and there, and other such simple adornments.

I had taken especial pains with my own personal appearance. At that time it suited me best to dress either superbly, as was my habit when I was with Sir Henry in Paris,

or else as plainly as possible. This afternoon I wore a plain white dress of nun's veiling, with flounces of lace. My only ornament was a large Gloire de Dijon just out of bud.

He came into the room and straight up to me with a radiant face, and the blood rushed into my face with pleasure, and I felt my hand glow as I held it out to greet him.

"It has been a long waiting," he said, "and a hard one; but I have got my reward at last. Is it not so?"

"I suppose so," I answered, "if it has been worth the waiting for."

"Worth the waiting for!" he said, placing a hand on each of my shoulders, and looking down into my eyes. "Worth waiting for! I would have waited as long

as Jacob waited for Rachel." And then he kissed me on the lips, and again I felt the blood leap up blazing into my face.

In a minute or two we were seated on either side of the fireplace. The window was wide open. The window-sill was bright with red geranium and yellow lady-slipper, while across these came the murmur of the waves breaking on the shingle, with now and again the wild cry of some sea-gull hovering high over the water.

Presently, in fact almost immediately, we found ourselves talking about the future which we seemed almost to have reached. That we were to remain with the regiment was settled, and indeed to follow it to India, when its turn came for foreign service. And beyond this there was really nothing to be said, although we should not have

been English, or for the matter of that, ordinarily human, if we had not touched upon ways and means.

I told him of my income, which had, at any rate, the advantage of putting us beyond the reach of any pecuniary anxiety, whether the Queen's Musketeers remained in England or was ordered abroad, and assured him emphatically and truly that I should thoroughly enjoy garrison life.

He, when he came to his own affairs, hesitated a little at first, and then plunged boldly into them.

"Our regiment," he said, "is not a cheap one to live in, of course. No man could live in it unless he had four or five hundred a year besides his pay, and I do not wish to exchange if I can help it. But my father has always been very liberal to me, and is not less likely to be so now; so

that we have really nothing to trouble about, and can even manage in our own little way for the present, at any rate, not only to rub on, as they say, but even to enjoy ourselves. In fact, I cannot see what we have to trouble about."

"And how about your father?" I asked. "Will he give his consent to your marriage with me?"

"My father," he replied, "would no doubt have been better pleased if I had gone through the unnecessary formality of first applying to him for his most valuable advice and gracious permission in a matter so important. For that, however, there was not sufficient time, as I could only have written to him to tell him that my own mind was made up, and could not until to-day have written more definitely. I shall write now—in fact, to-night—and my letter

will, I expect, bring him down at once to see us, as we obviously cannot go up together to see him and my mother. But he is not the kind of man to interfere with my choice, or to raise any objection to it.

“He wanted me, I remember, very much to go into the Engineers, which of course I could have done as my pass-out from Sandhurst showed; but I told him I preferred the cavalry. I think he was annoyed, for he suggested with a sneer that if I really wanted cavalry service with hard work and hard fighting, and a handsome uniform, I had better join the Indian irregular cavalry. But beyond that grunt of dissatisfaction, he kept his peace, and not only behaved very generously then, but has done even more for me than I have wanted ever since I joined. He is a very sensible man, and perhaps

the very last thing you would take him to be, is what he is — a judge. I shall write to him as soon as I get back to barracks.”

“Then,” said I brightly, “the sooner you get back to barracks the better; for I feel that I too want a walk, and if you will wait, I will put on my things and come part of the way with you.”

I went with him nearly as far as the barracks, and then turned down to the shore, where I sat down and began to trace meaningless figures on the sand with the point of my parasol.

It would be idle to pretend that I had forgotten George Sabine, or that I should ever forget him. But it would have been equally idle to pretend that I did not really love Captain Maltby quite well enough to marry him with a

clear conscience, and with the full belief that, as the years went on, I should love him more and more.

No doubt the life that now lay before me was not that to which I had once looked forward. There are few men in the world such as was Mr. Sabine, with all his natural gifts, and all the advantages with which fortune had favoured him; not yet in the prime of life, handsome, magnificently strong, full of energy and daring, and with a fortune that enabled him to gratify even his smallest caprice.

But I could now think calmly of George as of a friend lost for ever. As for poor Mr. Meadowsweet, I am really afraid that I did not think of him at all; had I done so, I am sure it would have been with the greatest kindness, and as of a most true, brave, and loyal officer of the church

militant. But he somehow had faded beyond even the horizon of my present vision.

This may have been heartless on my part, or it may not. I cannot tell. I simply record the truth. I have written all along to chronicle the facts of my life, and not to explain them away.

Next morning brought me, before I was out of bed, a telegram, which I was startled to find came from Captain Maltby. It was sent from the station, and was of serious import. He was off to London at once, and had no time to write. His elder brother had been thrown from his horse and was not expected to live. A letter would follow as soon as possible.

Here was fortune again playing me her bewildering tricks, and I had had by this

time sufficient experience of her to feel thoroughly uneasy.

I knew that I could trust Captain Maltby himself thoroughly and implicitly. But, on the other hand, it was impossible to tell, if his position should be materially altered by his brother's death, what influences or arguments might not be brought to bear upon him, or what pressure might not be put upon him.

And I had already come, not, I think, without sufficient reason, to regard all uncertainty in life as dangerous, and involving something much more than mere matter for disquietude.

Clearly, however, there was nothing to be done but to wait; and, as I had once waited for a verdict, so I felt that I must now hold my soul in patience, and wait for something far more important to me

than the verdict of any jury was ever likely to be. And, after all, the chances of the game were all in my favour.

Captain Maltby's pay and my own income would be amply sufficient for us, if we lived quietly, whatever his father might think, or even do. So that, really, my mind was only troubled about himself, for I knew that he had been much attached to his brother, and that with brothers there is no *via media*. Either the love between them is that to which David likened his love for Jonathan, or else they detest one another cordially, and make no secret about the fact. And, consequently, I was deeply grieved for Maltby's sake, and felt as sorry as I could feel at the danger of a man whom I had never seen, and only knew by name.

Almost at the last hour that evening

came a second telegram to tell me that his brother had died ; that the base of his skull had been fractured, and that he had never recovered consciousness.

I sat up late that night, thinking over matters from every point of view by the dim, pleasant light of a shaded reading lamp. I am afraid my thoughts, except in so far as my sincere regard and affection for Maltby himself might be concerned, were somewhat selfish. I knew, as I have said, that I could trust him ; but then, in this life, you can never be entirely certain how any man will act under sudden and trying circumstances.

Every man has his price, although the price is not always ponderable. The chances that the old judge would disapprove of our marriage we had already discussed and dismissed ; and yet I could not avoid a

strange, weird uneasiness, a sort of presentiment of coming trouble. And so I sat on "gnawing my soul," until the chill of the first hour before daybreak, always the coldest hour of the twenty-four, drove me to bed in spite of myself.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEXT morning brought me a letter. A soldier's letters are usually short, and this one was no exception to the general rule. Captain Maltby began by saying that he had hardly time to write at all, although he was always thinking of me. He had been obliged, perforce, to apply for extension of leave. The whole household at present was in confusion, for his mother was really dangerously ill from grief, and his father was in a highly nervous condition which required constant care and attention. Everything consequently devolved upon himself.

As soon as things had in the least degree settled down I should see him, if it was only for a few hours; meantime, I should hear from him constantly, if it were only a couple of lines to say that he was well.

I wrote back to him an affectionate letter, but not at all at too great length, carefully avoiding any allusion that might suggest that my mind was in the least degree uneasy as to my own position, and I also said that I should send him myself a short line every day which would be merely to let him know how I was, and would not in any way call for a reply.

This letter despatched, I adhered religiously to its pledges. My daily letter to him was commendably brief, and so worded as not to call for anything like a specific answer.

I told him each day how I was, what I had been doing, and what I had been reading, and took the very greatest care not to trouble him with any of the details of garrison gossip. I had been a wife myself once, and I knew, or fancied I knew, the kind of letter which a man would like to have from the woman he intends to marry.

The day after his brother's funeral I heard from him, although, as usual, very briefly. The next day he wrote again to say that I might expect him daily, that he had already that morning spoken to his father about our intended marriage, and that, although the old gentleman had not said anything at all definite, there was every reason to believe and suppose that everything would turn out well and happily, although naturally our marriage would have, for a short time, to be deferred. The letter was

very affectionate, and made me extremely happy. I had, of course, opened it before even looking at the superscription of any of my other communications that morning.

But I next turned to and opened a letter also with a deep black rim and sealed with an immense crest. The address was in a distinctly commercial hand, and the letter itself, as I had expected the moment my eye first fell upon it, was from Maltby *père*.

I cannot help giving it exactly as it was written, though it would be difficult to reproduce the terribly chilling effect of the pedantic caligraphy with the clearly defined margin. It was the letter of a man who weighed and measured his words as the old judge must for many years have been in the habit of doing, regarding his view on any given subject as a case for

an opinion to be marked off by his clerk into folios of so many words each, and paid for at a guinea or two guineas or more per folio, according to the magnitude of the interests at stake.

“99a, Wimpole Street, London, W.,
“*May 28th*, 188—.

TO LADY CRAVEN.

“MADAM,

“I have heard from my son, with very great astonishment, that he considers himself engaged to be married to you, and he adds that he feels bound, as an officer and a gentleman, to fulfil his word.

“Of the impropriety of his taking so important a step without first consulting me as his father, I need hardly speak; I think, on reflection, it must be obvious

to yourself. This, however, is by no means all with which I have, I conceive, a right to be indignant in the matter.

“It is almost certain that, in the course of events, I shall receive a distinguished mark of Her Majesty’s favour, in the form of a Peerage and a seat in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, to which body, *ex officio*, I already belong. This peerage will, of course, descend to my heirs, and should my son persist in his present determination, it will be impossible for me to place my services at Her Majesty’s disposal.

“If, then, you have any real affection for Captain Maltby, your sense of duty will, I am sure, lead you at once to unconditionally release him from his engagement to yourself, and so to avoid, amongst

other things, an irreconcilable estrangement between a father and his only surviving son.

“I have spoken plainly on this painful subject, because I feel very deeply. But I have endeavoured as much as possible to spare your feelings, and if I have in any way wounded them, you will, I am sure, accept my sincere expression of regret.

“I am coming down myself to see you and to hear your decision, and I shall wait on you in person at noon to-morrow, when I shall trust to find you alone and disengaged.

“I have the honour to be, Madam,

“Your very obedient Servant,

“JOSEPH MALTBY.”

Now I just wish any one of my readers seriously to ask themselves whether a more

deliberately insulting letter, from a man to a woman, was ever written in cold blood.

I had been many times before angry in my life. But this time I was thoroughly roused. The Pharisaism of the whole thing, the intolerable assumption of blue blood in a man whose extraction, as everybody knew perfectly well, had been humbler than even that of the great Lord St. Leonards himself. My blood fairly boiled. Then I began, in spite of myself, to laugh, for I remembered a story, which, apropos, by-the-way, of his own father, Captain Maltby had told me about two recent Lord Chancellors, of whom one was the eminent lawyer to whom I have just referred; the other was Lord Westbury, then only plain Sir Richard Bethell.

“Sugden,” said Westbury, one day across

the dining-table at Lincoln's Inn Hall, in those malicious tones in which he used to drop out his words as if they were vitriol, "Sugden, talking of fathers, what was your father?"

"A barber!" answered Sugden, unabashed.

"He, he," tittered Westbury, "pity he didn't make you one."

"Bethell," retorted Sugden at the top of his voice, and resting his head in his hands, and his elbows on the table so as to get a square look at his assailant, "what was your father?"

"A gentleman," retorted Bethell, with another sneer.

"Pity he didn't make you one," said Sugden, resuming his meal without the least show of irritation.

It did not take me long to make up my mind how to act. I appeared myself as if

I had been expecting a joint deputation of dignitaries and magnates from a Cathedral Chapter, a Dépôt Centre, and the Foreign Office itself.

Then, instead of fidgeting myself at the post, as racing men say, I, on the contrary, calmly pulled myself together, and by an odd coincidence found myself reading about Bishop Proudie in "Barchester Towers" and thinking of the Very Reverend the Dean.

While I was thus occupied the judge knocked at the door with judicial precision and impressiveness, and was ushered into the room with his most judicial aspect upon his features. He was tall like his son, and the lines of his face may once have been handsome. Now they were only strongly marked, and almost repellent.

I rose to acknowledge him, and requested him to take a seat, which I had so placed.

that the light should give him no possible advantage. I then began myself by asking him point-blank what it was he had to say to me, and I am pretty certain that this shot across his bows took him a bit aback, for he began to noisily clear his throat, which is always with consequential and self-sufficient men the first symptom of discomfiture.

“I have come down here, Lady Craven,” he commenced, “as a matter of duty solely, and at great personal inconvenience to myself, postponing even my judicial duties to the imperative necessity for this visit.”

I inclined my head as much as to indicate that I was really beginning to be interested in spite of myself, and answered monotonously, clearly, and without the least inflection in my voice: “Indeed, Sir Joseph, and what then?”

I saw at once the veins swell in his throat and temples and the blood rush to his face.

“What then, do you ask me, Lady Craven? Surely, you must be aware, as well as myself, of the very sufficient reasons that exist for my undertaking this most unpleasant duty. You must already have received my letter.”

“Your letter, Sir Joseph, reached me in due course, and I have read it. I do not see that it requires any answer whatever on my part, nor am I prepared to enter with you into any discussion of my own affairs.”

“But you can hardly have considered, Lady Craven, the nature of the interests that are at stake and their overwhelming importance.”

“I beg your pardon, Sir Joseph, I had considered them very fully before your letter

even reached me; but I shall be glad, of course, to listen to anything you may have to say."

I do not think I ever before saw, or have ever since seen a man of Sir Joseph's undoubted ability so thoroughly exasperated. He was perfectly furious, although his self-control was admirable.

"You do not seem," said he, "to fully understand the position. My son is entirely dependent upon myself; and, if he marries you, he must at once leave the regiment and renounce hopelessly a career in life for which he seems in every respect fitted, and in which he has already given, as I am informed" (I wonder he did not add, "and verily believe,") "marked promise of brilliant success."

"Pardon me, Sir Joseph, that is by no

means the case. My own private income, as my solicitors can satisfy you, is amply secured, and Captain Maltby and I consider that in addition to his pay it will be more than sufficient to enable him to remain in the regiment, even in England. You can have the figures if you would like to know them, and the nature of the securities. I have copies of most of the documents in that despatch-box on my writing-table."

Again the blood rushed violently to his face. "I wish to know nothing whatever of your affairs, Lady Craven, and shall certainly not look at your private papers. I dare say what you may tell me is correct, but it does not affect my objections in the least."

"Excuse me, Sir Joseph, it was by way of direct and categorical answer to your